2

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESBYTERIES;

AND A

GENERAL VIEW

OF THEIR SENTIMENTS CONCERNING

RELIGION

AND

ECCLESIASTICAL ORDER.

BY A CONVENTION OF SAID PRESPYTERIES.

——*See that thou make all things according to the pattern ſhewed to thee in the mount.*

JEHOVAH.

——*Teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you.*

JESUS CHRIST.

——*Not for that we have dominion over your faith.*

PAUL.

——*Neither as being Lords over God's heritage.*

PETER.

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A

BRIEF ACCOUNT

OF THE

ASSOCIATED

PRESBYTERIES.

CHAPTER I.

Of the Riſe and Formation of the ASSOCIATED PRESBYTERIES.

THE word of God, contained in the ſcriptures of the old and new teſtaments, is a perfect rule of faith and practice. It contains all that is important and neceſſary to be obſerved in religion. In that unerring directory ſome things are plainly expreſſed; others are to be collected from general rules, or managed according to the dictates of reaſon. The latter, we muſt ſuppoſe, are not of the greateſt importance, eſpecially when doubtful and diſputable. In ſuch caſes, if rules are neceſſary, human prudence muſt direct. Such are, the place and

hour of the day for public worſhip, and the order of the exerciſes, and other matters of decency in religious aſſemblies.

Some men of learning have ſuppoſed, that Chriſt has not inſtituted any particular form or mode of church-government, or left in his word any fixed plan or model of a church and its adminiſtration. Theſe men have too much ſenſe and underſtanding to pretend that claſſical preſbyteries, provincial or national ſynods, councils or aſſemblies, having judicial power, are appointed in ſcripture as a mode of eccleſiaſtical government: and therefore when they adopt and advocate ſuch a mode, they alledge, that Chriſt has left it to his people to manage the affairs of his churches, according to their own judgment and diſcretion, as time, place and circumſtances may require. But we cannot admit, that matters of ſuch importance are left in this uncertain ſtate. Were this the caſe, the people of God would evidently be expoſed to innumerable impoſitions, according to the caprice of ſelfiſh and deſigning men, who love to have the pre-eminence. Experience confirms this obſervation; for chriſtians have been loaded with various rites, ceremonies and burdens, impoſed by ambitious men who profeſſed a general regard to the rules of ſcripture. And when the churches departed from the plain and eaſy directions of God's word, and the primitive mode of managing eccleſiaſtical affairs, and admitted regulations of human invention, they gradually loſt their liberty, and,

in time, became wholly ſubject to the exorbitant tyranny and domination of the man of ſin. Worthy of particular obſervation is the following account of this, by an eminent writer of eccleſiaſtical hiſtory.

"During a great part of this (the ſecond) "century, the chriſtian churches were independ- "ent on each other; nor were they joined by "aſſociation, confederation, or any other bonds "but thoſe of charity. But in proceſs of time "all the chriſtian churches of a province were "formed into one large eccleſiaſtical body, "which, like confederated ſtates, aſſembled at "certain times to deliberate about the common "intereſts of the whole. This inſtitution had "its origin among the Greeks, with whom no- "thing was more common than this confedera- "cy of independent ſtates, and the regular aſ- "ſemblies which met in conſequence thereof, at "fixed times, and were compoſed of the depu- "ties of each reſpective ſtate. But theſe eccle- "ſiaſtical aſſociations were not long confined to "the Greeks; their great utility was no ſooner "perceived than they became univerſal, and "were formed in all places where the goſpel "had been planted. To theſe aſſemblies, in "which the deputies or commiſſioners of ſeve- "ral churches conſulted together, the name of "*ſynods* was appropriated by the Greeks, and "that of *councils* by the Latins; and the laws "that were enacted in theſe general meetings "were called *canons*, that is, *rules*.

"Theſe *councils*, of which we find not the "ſmalleſt trace before the middle of this centu- "ry, changed the whole face of the church and "gave it a new form; for by them the ancient "privileges of the people were conſiderably di- "miniſhed, and the power and authority of the "biſhops greatly augmented. The humility, "indeed, and prudence of theſe pious prelates, "prevented their aſſuming, all at once, the pow- "er with which they were afterwards inveſted: "At their firſt appearance in theſe general coun- "cils, they acknowledged that they were no "more than the delegates of their reſpective "churches, and that they acted in the name, "and by the appointment of their people. But "they ſoon changed this humble tone, imper- "ceptibly extended the limits of their authority, "turned their influence into dominion, and their "counſels into laws, and openly aſſerted, at "length, that Chriſt had empowered them to "preſcribe to his people, *authoritative rules* of "*faith* and *manners*. Another effect of theſe "councils was, the gradual abolition of that "perfect equality which reigned among all bi- "ſhops in the primitive times. For, the order "and decency of theſe aſſemblies required, that "ſome one of the provincial biſhops, met in "council, ſhould be inveſted with a ſuperior "degree of power and authority, and hence the "rights of metropolitans derive their origin. In "the mean time the bounds of the church were "enlarged; the cuſtom of holding councils was "followed wherever the ſound of the goſpel

"had reached, and the univerſal church had "now the appearance of one vaſt republic, form-"ed by a combination of a great number of "little ſtates. This occaſioned the creation of "a new order of eccleſiaſtics, who were ap-"pointed in different parts of the world, as "heads of the church, and whoſe office it was "to preſerve the conſiſtence and union of that "immenſe body, whoſe members were ſo wide-"ly diſperſed throughout the nations. Such "was the nature and office of the *patriarchs*, "among whom, at length, ambition, being ar-"rived at its moſt inſolent period, formed a "new dignity, inveſting the Biſhop of Rome, "and his ſucceſſors, with the title and authority "of Prince of the Patriarchs."

Such has been the effect which human invention, directed by ambition, has produced in eccleſiaſtical affairs—a conſideration, which ſuggeſts the importance and neceſſity of rules eſtabliſhed by divine authority, and affords abundant reaſon to conclude, that Chriſt has not left his people without them. Certainly the goſpel is as perfect as the law. Moſes was required to "make all things," pertaining to the houſe of God, "according to the pattern ſhewn him in "the mount." Chriſt is "accounted worthy "of more glory than Moſes;" if the latter was "faithful as a ſervant," in all God's houſe, the former was faithful "as a ſon over his own "houſe."* It is unreaſonable, therefore, to

Heb. iii. 3, 6.

ſuppoſe that he has left his church, "which he "purchaſed with his own blood,"* without the beſt regulations.

If Chriſt has given complete directions for the conduct of his miniſters and people, in the "houſe of God, which is the church of the liv- "ing God,"† and aſcertained in his word the matter, form and government of his churches, a deviation from his preſcribed rules, and the ſubſtitution and obſervance of others, muſt be conſidered as an arrogant uſurpation of his authority, and a direct rebellion againſt the king of Zion. Thoſe, therefore, "who call Chriſt "Lord," ſhould ſearch and examine with great caution and diligence, the laws which he has given, and be careful in eccleſiaſtical as well as other matters, to "do the things which he ſays."‡

Among the unalienable rights of men, that of conſcience is the moſt ſacred and important. Other rights are eſtimated according to their tendency to promote earthly emolument; but this reſpects the favor of God, and the eternal poſſeſſion and enjoyment of the ſupreme good. That every man may worſhip and ſerve God as appears to him right, is, at this day, generally admitted. And to change our religious ſentiments and mode of worſhip, at any period of life, though it is often conſidered a matter of reproach, is not really an argument of peculiar

* *Acts*, xx. 28. † 1. *Tim.* iii. 15. ‡ *Luke*, vi. 46.

wickedneſs or weakneſs. It proves, indeed, that men may err; but this is acknowledged, as the univerſal character of the ſpecies. To change from wrong to right, ought always to be reputed honorable. Averſion to an alteration of religious principles, commonly ariſes from pride, or the influence of tradition, bigotry, or ſuperſtition: and the reproach of inſtability, which has been liberally caſt on thoſe who have found reaſon to renounce their old opinions, and embrace new ones, has undoubtedly tended to prevent reformation in religion, and obſtruct the increaſe of light and purity in the church.

The miniſters who firſt withdrew from the Preſbytery of New-York, and the Synod of New-York and Philadelphia, and formed the Aſſociated Preſbytery of Morris-County, in the year 1780, claimed a right to worſhip and manage eccleſiaſtical affairs in a way which appeared to them agreeable to the word of God; but profeſſed to exercise charity towards thoſe of different ſentiments, and cautiouſly avoid whatever might tend to injure or diſturb them in their modes of worſhip and diſcipline. And tho' they ſeparated from their former connections, and adopted a line of conduct in ſeveral reſpects different from that which they had before obſerved, yet they declared, and in the opinion of many, evinced, that they acted with as little oſtentation and noiſe, with as little appearance of a ſchiſmatical deſign, and with as much friendſhip and brotherly affection towards others of different

ſentiments and practice, as was conſiſtent with their thinking and acting for themſelves. Having peaceably withdrawn from the body to which they belonged, they thought it their duty to unite in a voluntary ſociety or *preſbytery*, that they might be under better advantages to promote religion and aſſiſt each other in managing eccleſiaſtical affairs, according to the principles in which they were agreed; and having met together for this purpoſe, they made and publiſhed the following declaration, viz:

"*Hanover, May* 3, 1780.

"WE, miniſters of the goſpel, viz. "JACOB GREEN, AMZI LEWIS, JOSEPH GOOVER, "and EBENEZER BRADFORD, for various reaſons, "which we think ſufficient to juſtify ourſelves, "have withdrawn from the Preſbytery of New-"York, and from the Synod of New-York and "Philadelphia; and without deſiring or deſign-"ing to make any unſcriptural or uncharitable "breach or ſeparation among miniſters and "churches, think proper to form ourſelves into "a voluntary ſociety for promoting the intereſt "of religion. And as we conſider ourſelves "preſbyterians in a ſcriptural ſenſe, we agree to "call ourſelves and be known by the name of "*The Preſbytery of Morris-County.** And as it "may be expected that we ſhould give ſome

* *They did not for ſome reaſons call themſelves an aſſociated preſbytery when they firſt formed, but af-*

" reaſons why we have withdrawn, we think the
" following ſufficient:

" As every one ought, ſo we not only chooſe,
" but feel ourſelves bound to be on a plan or
" ſcheme of religion and church government as
" agreeable to ſcripture as poſſible; and we can-
" not be cramped by any human power, ſo as to
" prevent our ſerving God and doing good to
" mankind according to the beſt light we have.
" And we think that the preſbyterianiſm of the
" church of Scotland, and of the Synod of New-
" York and Philadelphia, is not wholly founded
" on ſcripture: but that it takes the power too
" much out of the hands of the brethren of the
" church, and gives an unſcriptural and an un-
" reaſonable power to the elders, ſo that, if they
" are corrupt, they will tyrannize over the
" churches of Chriſt. We find the ſynod have
" made many rules, canons or orders, which
" we think very inconſiſtent with the liberties of
" chriſtian churches, which rules or orders now
" ſtand on their records: and we have found
" ourſelves cramped and reſtrained by thoſe rules
" or orders of ſynod, ſo that we could not, in
" ſome inſtances, do what we thought ought to
" be done for the intereſt of religion. And tho'
" we do not mention our different ſentiments

terwards adopted that ſtile as expreſſive of the liberal principles of their conſtitution.

"concerning the qualifications for ſacraments,* "as a ſufficient reaſon to withdraw from our "brethren, yet, as we have other reaſons which "are ſufficient, we muſt ſay, that this is a cor- "roborating one: and we withdraw with more "freedom, when we conſider, that we who with- "draw, are agreed in our ſentiments reſpecting "qualifications for church-privileges, and can, "without jarring ſentiments, join together in "promoting the order and diſcipline which "Chriſt has appointed in his churches.

"And we being now met for the purpoſe of "forming ourſelves into a preſbytery, and having "united in ſolemn prayer to God for wiſdom, "direction and aſſiſtance, do think proper, in or- "der to promote the intereſt of religion, to come "into the following friendly and prudential a- "greements, viz.

"I. That the preſbytery will ordinarily meet "twice in a year, and oftener if it appears need- "ful, to conſult and agree upon the moſt expe- "dient meaſures to promote religion, and give "the churches opportunity to apply to them for "the advice and aſſiſtance, which it is proper for "an *aſſociated* preſbytery to afford them.

"II. We agree to invite each church to ſend

* *The miniſters who made this declaration were Edwardians, with reſpect to the qualifications for ſacraments.*

" an elder* or delegate to attend this preſbytery " at each ſeſſion, and join with us in our endea- " vors to promote the Redeemer's kingdom.

" III. As we deſign to proceed regularly and " endeavor to promote religion, we agree that a " moderator ſhall be choſen at each ſtated preſ- " bytery, and a clerk to minute the moſt material " tranſactions; and that we will begin and con- " clude with prayer.

" IV. We agree that this preſbytery, as a body, " ſhall never aſſume or claim any juriſdiction " over the churches, or authoritatively intermed- " dle with their affairs, any farther than as they " ſhall apply to us and requeſt our advice or " other aſſiſtance.

" V. The preſbytery ſhall make no rules, " which ſhall be authoritative, and all agreements " ſhall be alterable as circumſtances ſhall re- " quire."

The preſbytery thus formed and eſtabliſhed, increaſed in number, reputation and influence; and being ſenſible of the importance of educating youth for the goſpel miniſtry, and of uſing means to propagate truth among mankind in general,

* *The word* elder *was not uſed to expreſs any thing different from a delegate, but in compliance with the common mode of expreſſion in the neighbor- ing churches.*

and particularly among the deſtitute people in the newly ſettled and ſettling parts of our country, it was judged expedient to attempt to eſtabliſh a fund, by which they might aſſiſt poor and pious youth in obtaining an education, and ſupport itinerant evangeliſts and other inſtructors, who might labor to promote learning and religion among the poor in the deſtitute parts of our land. Accordingly, the plan being propoſed, and application made, ſundry charitable people contributed for the inſtitution of a fund, and money was collected in this way to a conſiderable amount, to be expended at the diſcretion of the preſbytery, for promoting the important ends which they had in view.

The ſucceſs which attended theſe firſt attempts, and the proſpect of more extenſive uſefulneſs in the proſecution of the propoſed plan, encouraged the preſbytery to ſeek a charter of incorporation, by which the donations of charitable people might be better ſecured, and more certainly applied according to the wiſh of the donors. Accordingly, the proper meaſures being taken, an incorporating act was obtained from the Legiſlature of the ſtate of New-Jerſey, by which act ſundry perſons named, were incorporated as truſtees of the preſbytery, denominated the ſociety inſtituted in Morris-County for the promotion of learning and religion. By this act the preſbytery, being the ſociety deſcribed, was capacitated by their truſtees "to purchaſe, take, hold, "receive and enjoy any meſſuages, houſes,

« buildings, lands, tenements, rents, poſſeſſions,
« and other hereditaments and real eſtate, in
« fee-ſimple or otherwiſe; and alſo goods, chat-
« tles, legacies and donations, given to the ſaid
« ſociety, in any way or manner, and all other
« things of what kind or quality ſoever to the
« amount of a ſum, the annual income whereof
« ſhall not exceed *five hundred pounds.*"*

The preſbytery of Morris-County becoming numerous, and in their local ſituation much ſcattered—and a number of the members who lived at a diſtance from the uſual places of meeting, being ſo ſituated with reſpect to each other in the counties of Weſtcheſter and Dutcheſs, in the ſtate of New-York, that they could not conveniently meet together and do buſineſs; and there being a proſpect that an aſſociated preſbytery would be uſeful in thoſe parts, it was agreed in October, 1791, that ſeveral members of Morris-County preſbytery, who were then mentioned as being moſt conveniently ſituated for that purpoſe, ſhould form a new preſbytery.

Accordingly in January, 1792, the miniſters who were named in the agreement, with ſeveral others in the vicinity, met and formed themſelves into a preſbytery by the name of the Aſſociated Weſtcheſter Preſbytery, upon the ſame general principles with the preſbytery of Morris County,

* *See the Act at length at the end of the book.*

and adopted ſimilar rules for the regulation of their body.*

The rapid increaſe of inhabitants in the northern and weſtern parts of the ſtate of New-York, and the extenſive opening for miniſterial labors among them, ſuggeſted the idea of forming an aſſociated preſbytery in the vicinity of Albany, by a number of miniſters of Edwardian ſentiments, concerning doctrines and church diſcipline, in order to afford deſtitute churches, and the ſcattered people in thoſe newly ſettled countries all poſſible aſſiſtance with reſpect to religious inſtruction, and to promote the cauſe of the great Redeemer. On this important affair the aſſociation of Berkſhire County in Maſſachuſetts, and the aſſociated preſbyteries of Morris County and Weſtcheſter being conſulted, were unanimouſly of opinion, that the formation of ſuch a body would afford a proſpect of extenſive utility.

Accordingly, Meſſrs. John Camp, John Stevens, Beriah Hotchkin, Robert Campbell, David Porter, and Luther Gleſon, miniſters of the goſpel in the ſtate of New York, convened at New-Canaan, November 12, 1793; and after con-

* *The members of the preſbytery of Morris County, who united in forming the aſſociated preſbytery of Weſtcheſter, were Meſſrs. Amzi Lewis, John Cornwell, Silas Conſtant, and John Townley; and the miniſters who joined with them were Meſſrs. Abner Benedict, Medad Rogers, and Daniel Marſh.*

verſing with each other upon their reſpective ſentiments in divinity and chriſtian experience, formed into an aſſociated preſbytery, on ſimilar principles to thoſe of Morris County and Weſtcheſter preſbyteries, to be known by the name of the northern Aſſociated Preſbytery in the ſtate of New-York.

The northern preſbytery being thus formed, and contemplating the advantage that might be expected from the acquaintance, united exertions, and mutual aſſiſtance of miniſters of ſimilar ſentiments and views, in different and diſtant parts of the country, appointed a committee to meet with committees from the other preſbyteries, to conſult upon the proper meaſures for eſtabliſhing a plan of correſpondence between the aſſociated bodies. Accordingly the committees appointed by the ſeveral aſſociated preſbyteries met at Poughkeepſie on the ſecond Tueſday of April, 1794. At this meeting it was agreed, that the committees report to their reſpective preſbyteries as their unanimous opinion, that it would be expedient "that each preſbytery ſhould "annually appoint two or more correſpondents, "whoſe buſineſs it ſhould be to communicate to "each other from time to time, by letter or "otherwiſe, ſuch information concerning the "doings, propoſals and proſpects of their re"ſpective preſbyteries, as might be thought ex"pedient or neceſſary in order to obtain that "mutual aſſiſtance which was the object of the "propoſed correſpondence: and that theſe cor-

"respondents ſhould annually meet, as a con-
"vention of correſpondence, to obtain a general
"and extenſive view of the ſtate of religion, and
"the calls for miniſterial labor within the circle
"of their acquaintance, and propoſe and recom-
"mend to the ſeveral preſbyteries, ſuch mea-
"ſures as, from a general view of the ſtate of
"things, might appear to them adapted as pro-
"per means to promote the cauſe of the Re-
"deemer." It was alſo agreed by the commit-
tees at the ſame meeting, to recommend to the ſeveral aſſociated preſbyteries, to meet in convention at Poughkeepſie, on the firſt Tueſday of the enſuing September, in order to promote union and brotherly love, and unite in the publication of ſome of their ſentiments concerning religion, and the order and government of the churches. And the ſeveral preſbyteries in their next ſeſſions agreed to this report.

When any body of men diſtinguiſh themſelves by peculiar religious ſentiments, and adopt a line of conduct ſo different from others as to acquire a diſtinct name, the public generally expect ſome account of their principles and practice; and conſequently enquire after their conſtitution, articles or confeſſion of faith. For this reaſon it has been thought that the aſſociated preſbyteries ought to publiſh ſomething to inform the world what they are. Influenced by general cuſtom, and ſome peculiar motives, the preſbytery of Morris-County publiſhed, in the year 1781, a view of a chriſtian church and church govern-

ment, with ſundry other things adapted to give information concerning their reaſons for withdrawing from their former connection, and their general principles and practice in eccleſiaſtical affairs. But many ſuppoſe that a more ample account of our diſtinguiſhing ſentiments and conduct is now become neceſſary, and frequently enquire after our confeſſion of faith, and general plan of proceeding. To ſatisfy ſuch enquirers, as far as appears reaſonable and conſiſtent, and exhibit a teſtimony in favor of truth, it has been agreed by the Aſſociated Preſbyteries in convention, to re-publiſh the ſubſtance of the view before mentioned, with ſuch alterations as they judged needful, and ſuch additions as the following chapters contain.

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CHAPTER II.

Of Confeſſions of Faith.

MOST religious ſocieties, when publicly known and diſtinguiſhed from others, in their principles or practice, have thought it expedient to publiſh ſummaries of the doctrines which they receive, under the title of Confeſſions of Faith. The ends propoſed by ſuch publications have been principally theſe two, viz. To exhibit to the public their religious principles—and to eſtabliſh a teſt or ſtandard of orthodoxy. Confeſſions of faith may, under certain circum-

ſtances, have been uſeful in both theſe reſpects: but, at this day, are far leſs beneficial than ſome have ſuppoſed. To the preſent uſe of confeſſions of faith, either as exhibitions of received principles, or ſtandards of orthodoxy, there are weighty objections: for, if ſuch confeſſions are conſidered as exhibitions of the religious principles received by any ſociety of men, they have long ſince, in a great meaſure, ceaſed to anſwer the end propoſed. For they have often been ſubſcribed, for ſiniſter purpoſes, by thoſe who diſbelieved and deſpiſed them in their hearts; and have been made an occaſion and cover of ſcenes of hypocriſy, diſhonorable to God, and reproachful to the chriſtian name.

If we conſider confeſſions of faith as teſts of orthodoxy, they have been the occaſion of great evils. For, by a ſcrupulous adherence to thoſe written forms, churches have ſunk inſenſibly into lifeleſs formality in religion; the ſpirit of free enquiry has been checked, and bigotry, and an unmanly attachment to tradition, have been greatly promoted. To confirm this obſervation, inſtances might be eaſily produced, but it might appear invidious, and perhaps is needleſs.

As hiſtory of fact, confeſſions of faith may be uſeful. Viewed in this light, they will be generally conſtrued in their obvious ſenſe, and be eſteemed not according to their orthodoxy, but hiſtorical truth. Thus the confeſſion of *Auſburg* may be highly valued, becauſe it ſhows what

Luther maintained at that time, and not becauſe it contains orthodox principles, or exhibits the real creed of his nominal followers.

Orthodox confeſſions of faith may alſo be uſeful, becauſe they contain theological truth, and teach thoſe principles which ought to be underſtood and believed. In this reſpect they are to be prized as good ſermons, doctrinal eſſays, and other books of religious inſtruction.

After what has been obſerved concerning confeſſions of faith, it will not be expected that we ſhould propoſe, by publiſhing one, to exhibit fully and infallibly our religious principles to others, or adopt one as a teſt of orthodoxy among ourſelves. Yet, perhaps, we are at preſent as well agreed, in our theological ſyſtem, as any public body of chriſtians or miniſters. We underſtand one another, and are entirely free and willing that our ſentiments ſhould be known to the world. But we know not one another by adopting or ſubſcribing a confeſſion of faith as a teſt of orthodoxy; nor do we expect to be known only in that way. We deſire to ſhake off the fetters of tradition and bigotry, and ſearch freely after truth, and would not be thought, by publiſhing ſome of our preſent ideas, to bind ourſelves to continue in the ſame ſentiments. We hope to improve in religious knowledge, and renounce our errors whenever they appear. At the ſame time we conſider it as our indiſpenſable

duty, as well as our great privilege, to look to the Father of lights for divine inſtruction.

If any wiſh for farther information concerning our ſentiments, we may add, that we are at preſent united in a general ſcheme of doctrine, which may be denominated Calviniſtic, Edwardian, or Hopkinſian; and we conſider thoſe ſyſtems, which in our day and country are generally diſtinguiſhed by thoſe terms, as eſſentially orthodox. Yet we call no man *father;* nor do we know of any public ſyſtem, or confeſſion of faith, conſiſting of many particulars, which we can unitedly adopt, without exception or explanation; and, with this liberty, we know of none which we cannot adopt. We therefore conſider no denomination as the ſtandard of chriſtian love, but receive into our charity, all who appear to us to exhibit evidence of real friendſhip to Chriſt.

The variety of ſchemes which may be found among different denominations of chriſtians, reſpecting divine ſovereignty and human agency, may be reſolved into three, and be thus expreſſed, viz.

1.—God doth all things, therefore man is not an agent.

2.—Man is an agent, therefore God doth not all things.

3.—God doth all things, and yet man is an agent.

The laſt is our creed, and perhaps will be admitted in words by many, who think very differently from us on the ſame ſubject.

But, that we may exhibit a farther teſtimony in favor of the doctrines of the goſpel, and preſent a general view of our religious ſentiments, as far as may be, in a few comprehenſive articles, we have ſubjoined a brief confeſſion of faith, which contains and expreſſes, as we conceive, ſome of the principal and eſſential truths which belong to an orthodox creed.

A Confeſſion of Faith.

I. OUR own exiſtence, the feelings and exerciſes of which we are conſcious, and the ſenſible objects around us, afford to every rational, attentive and candid mind, clear and certain evidence of the exiſtence of an eternal, uncauſed, infinitely intelligent and omnipotent being, who is called GOD, and is the creator, upholder, and ſupreme Lord of the univerſe, and whom all moral created agents are bound to worſhip and obey.

II. There is abundant evidence that the ſcriptures of the old and new teſtaments are a revelation from God, from the marvellous nature and ſublimity of the matter, the harmony of the

ſeveral parts, the purity of the doctrine, the miracles wrought in confirmation, the fulfilment of prophecy, and the divine influence attending the preaching of the word, and effecting the ſpread of the goſpel, by feeble inſtruments, againſt the moſt formidable oppoſition.

III. This divine revelation contains and communicates the moſt ample, clear and juſt inſtructions, concerning the nature and perfections of the ſupreme being, and the obligation, duty, character, and ſtate of man; gives the only ſatisfactory information concerning the way of ſalvation or acceptance with God, and exhibits a complete and unerring ſyſtem of rules for faith and practice.

IV. God is the infinitely wiſe, holy and univerſal governor of the world, invariably determined to promote the greateſt poſſible good; and for the accompliſhment of this end, all his creatures, with all their actions, are ſubject to his direction and control: and he having a full and comprehenſive view of his own infinite plan, and being the univerſal and conſtantly operating cauſe of all things, not a ſingle creature or event will be admitted into his ſyſtem, but which will, under his ſupreme and abſolute guidance, influence and efficiency, terminate in the accompliſhment of his grand deſign, which is the diſplay of the greateſt glory of God, and the promotion of the greateſt happineſs of the whole

ſyſtem, including God and all created moral agents.

V. Adam, the firſt parent of the human race, and the federal head of his poſterity, being fairly tried, tranſgreſſed the divine commandment; and, renouncing the authority of God, manifeſted, by his tranſgreſſion, a ſupreme regard to himſelf, and in this way ſhowed that mankind, under ſuch trials, would certainly tranſgreſs; and in conſequence of his tranſgreſſion, fell under condemnation, and would have been for ever puniſhed with that death, which is the proper wages of ſin, had not a ſaviour been provided: and all the human race, being of the ſame ſinful diſpoſition which Adam had, are alſo juſtly condemned as ſinners, and conſidered as under the curſe until redeemed by a mediator.

VI. Mankind, in their natural ſtate, are ſo wholly devoted to the gratification of their carnal and ſelfiſh deſires, that all their actions, even all the exerciſes and affections of their hearts, are ſelfiſh, and conſequently morally evil continually: ſo that, in the ſight of God, who ſearches the heart, there is no moral good in any thing which they do in an unregenerate ſtate; and therefore they cannot recommend themſelves to God, or prepare themſelves for his favor by their own works, or perform any thing which will have any avail towards their juſtification.

VII. To redeem mankind from that ſinful and miſerable ſtate in which they naturally are, God has provided a ſaviour, who was early intimated as the ſeed of the woman, and afterwards more clearly revealed, and in the fulneſs of time came into the world to ſave ſinners.

VIII. The work of redemption is the greateſt of all God's works; the brighteſt diſplay of the divine character; the great end of creation and providence, and the grand ſubject of divine revelation.

IX. The ſaviour of the world is Jeſus Chriſt, who is the eternal Word, made fleſh, and diſplayed in human nature; whoſe divine power and miſſion were manifeſted by his miraculous works; who taught the things of the kingdom of God, and brought life and immortality to light in his doctrine; who wrought out a righteouſneſs for the juſtification of his people, by his obedience unto death, and made atonement for the ſins of mankind by his ſufferings, in which he was made a curſe for them, and ſo opened a way for the pardon of ſin and juſtification of life, conſiſtently with the perfections and declarations of God.

X. Mankind are free moral agents, and therefore are under obligation to obey all the commandments of the law, and the calls and exhortations of the goſpel, and are blamable and juſtly puniſhable for every exerciſe of heart, not

exactly conformed to the holy directions which are contained in the revelation of God.

XI. Thoſe only, who cordially believe and embrace the truths which are contained in the teſtimony, which God, in the goſpel gives of Chriſt, and the way of life through him, are entitled to the promiſes, and become heirs of eternal life.

XII. Mankind in their natural ſtate, with one conſent, reject the teſtimony of God, which is given in the goſpel, and continue, without exception, in unbelief, until their hearts are renewed by the effectual operation of the holy ſpirit, and the implantation of faith and every ſpiritual grace.

XIII. In renewing the hearts of mankind and conferring divine grace upon them, God acts as a ſovereign, according to his mere good pleaſure, and his eternal purpoſe of election, leaving thoſe who are not the objects of his gracious choice, to periſh in the ſelfiſh purſuits which they freely chooſe.

XIV. In accompliſhing the purpoſes of divine grace, God hath made himſelf known to his creatures under the character of the Father, who is God; the Word, who is God, and manifeſted in the fleſh in the perſon of the Son of God, the Mediator; and the Holy Ghoſt, who is God, exerting a divine energy in producing the great

effects, which appear in that grand ſyſtem of divine operation, which is exhibeted in creation, providence and redemption.

XV. Thoſe who, according to the gracious pleaſure of God, are renewed by the energetic influence of the Holy Ghoſt, and united by faith to Jeſus Chriſt, are ſecured in him by the promiſes of the new covenant, and will therefore perſevere in faith and holineſs unto eternal life, not by any ſufficiency in themſelves, but by the power of God, and the continual ſupplies of grace, which are communicated to them from the head of all divine influence.

XVI. Though the ſalvation of God's people is wholly of grace, yet perſonal holineſs, or actual conformity to the law of God, in heart and life, being the effect of grace, and a neceſſary preparative for that happineſs which conſiſts in the enjoyment of a holy God, is included in ſalvation, and affords to the conſciences of believers, the only ſcriptural evidence of their juſtification and title to eternal life.

XVII. Holineſs conſiſts in a kind affection or diſintereſted love to the univerſe of intelligent beings, and implies a diſpoſition of heart to ſeek the glory of God as our ultimate end, and to do good and communicate to all ſenſitive beings as we have opportunity, in conformity to the law of love and the example of Chriſt, and according to the rank and import-

ance of the beings with which we are converſant, and their apparent connection with the univerſal ſyſtem.

XVIII. After the great day of aſſize, in which, the dead being raiſed, Jeſus Chriſt ſhall ſit as judge on the actions of men, their ſtate will remain unalterably fixed in happineſs or miſery to all eternity.

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CHAPTER III.

Of the Church in General.

THE word church, properly ſignifies a collection, congregation, or aſſembly of people. In this ſenſe it is always uſed in the ſacred writings. The original greek word does not always mean a chriſtian aſſembly, or even a religious one. The mob excited againſt Paul by the craftſmen of *Epheſus*, is called *eccleſia*, a church. When the town-clerk had thus ſpoken he diſmiſſed the aſſembly, that is, the church.* But the word is commonly uſed in the new teſtament to ſignify an aſſembly of chriſtians. In this application it ſometimes intends the members of the aſſembly, though not actually met, as when we read of the church coming together; and ſometimes the aſſembly actually

* *Acts* xix. 41.

met, as when we read of coming together in the church.* Other words, which ſignify ſocieties of people, are uſed in this double ſenſe. But a number of men, who never in any ſenſe come together, cannot with propriety be called a church.

The people of Iſrael who came out of Egypt, are called a church—"the church which was "in the wilderneſs;"† for they were but one congregation, and had but one place of meeting, viz. the tabernacle, which is therefore called, "the tabernacle of the congregation."‡

The word church is uſed to ſignify the whole body of the elect, or ſaints, both in heaven and earth, who are united in Chriſt as their head, and ſo all members of one body. Of this general aſſembly, the congregation of God's people of old was a type. As the Iſraelites all worſhipped at the earthly tabernacle, which typified Chriſt, ſo the ſaints, which are his body, all meet at the throne of grace, and have boldneſs to enter into the holieſt by his blood. And as the redeemed of the Lord on earth, thus aſſemble ſpiritually in heaven, ſo they form one aſſembly with ſaints and angels above, and are ſaid to be already *come to mount* Sion, *the city of the living God, the heavenly* Jeruſalem, *and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general aſſem-*

* 1 *Cor.* xi. 18, *and* xiv. 23. † *Acts* vii. 38.
‡ *Lev.* i. 1.

*bly and church of the firſt-born, who are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect.** The church, in this ſenſe, is catholic and inviſible, comprehending all true believers, who being united to Chriſt, derive from him ſpiritual bleſſings: and though, as a ſociety, they are to men inviſible, yet *the Lord knoweth them that are his.*†

To the inviſible church or body of Chriſt, every particular church, conſtituted according to the goſpel, viſibly belongs. But the word of God gives us no idea of a univerſal viſible church, under one viſible eccleſiaſtical government. Such a hierarchy has no foundation in the new teſtament, nor ever had exiſtence in the world. A viſible chriſtian church, according to ſcripture, is a number of perſons united in the faith and profeſſion of the goſpel, and agreeing to meet together in one place to obſerve all the ordinances of Chriſt. In this ſenſe we read of the church at *Jeruſalem*, at *Corinth*, at *Epheſus*, and many other places.

According to the proper and ſcriptural idea of a church, the word cannot be applied to any ſuppoſable or imaginary ſociety, which doth not aſſemble together. It is therefore never uſed in ſcripture to ſignify a collection, or aſſociation of particular churches in a province, kingdom or nation. In the new teſtament we never read

* *Heb.* xii. 22, 23. † 2 *Tim.* ii. 19.

of the church in a particular country, where there were evidently a number of chriſtian aſſemblies. In this caſe we always read of churches in the plural; as the churches of *Galatia*, the churches of *Judea*, the churches of *Macedonia*, and the ſeven churches of *Aſia*. And we are told, by good authority, that the word is never found in this collective ſenſe in all the writings of the fathers, for more than two hundred years after Chriſt.

The ſcripture never countenances the notion of a church repreſentative. To give the name of a church to a number of ruling elders, or others choſen, by a chriſtian aſſembly, to act in their behalf, is altogether arbitrary.

To the explanation which has been given of the word church, it may be objected, that in ſome cities, particularly in Jeruſalem, the church was too numerous to be only one aſſembly or congregation, and muſt therefore neceſſarily compredend a number of diſtinct aſſemblies or churches. But it ought to be conſidered, that the ſacred hiſtory repreſents them as meeting together: they were, therefore, one aſſembly. Whatever our conjectures may be, the teſtimony of God's word muſt ſtand. The inſpired hiſtorian expreſsly ſays, "All that believed were "together; and continued daily with one ac- "cord in the temple; and the twelve called the "multitude of the diſciples unto them; and "they were all with one accord in Solomon's

"porch: and the multitude muſt needs come "together."* No fact can be more fully aſſerted than the actual aſſembling of the multitude in Jeruſalem. To pretend, therefore, that they were too numerous, and therefore did not meet; is to deny the teſtimony of the ſacred page.

To render the objection plauſible to reaſon, it is neceſſary to prove, that all, or moſt of thoſe who were converted at Jeruſalem, were permanent members of that church, and that there was no place where the ſtated members could aſſemble as a body. But theſe things are not eaſily made out: For the Jewiſh males, from different parts of the world, commonly met at Jeruſalem at the great feſtivals of that nation; and it was on an occaſion of this kind that the ſpirit was ſo remarkably poured out, and thoſe great numbers converted which are mentioned in the beginning of the Acts. "And there "were then at Jeruſalem devout men from eve-"ry nation under heaven; Parthians, Medes, "Elamites, dwellers in Meſopotamia, Cappado-"cia, Pontus, Aſia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, E-"gypt, and the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, "ſtrangers of Rome, Jews and proſelytes, Cretes "and Arabians."† Perhaps many of thoſe who were converted did, in a few days after the feſtival was over, depart to their own homes. It was alſo on a ſimilar occaſion, that the many

* *Acts* ii. 44, 46, *and* vi. 2, *and* v. 12, *and* xxi. 22,
† *Acts* ii. 5, 9, 10, 11.

thouſands or myriads of believing Jews were at Jeruſalem, as mentioned in the 21ſt chapter. So that there is no evidence that there remained conſtantly at Jeruſalem, more chriſtians than could aſſemble at one place.

The abſurdity of ſuppoſing a church united under one form of government, and extended through a province, nation or the world, will appear obvious to thoſe who conſider the nature of church-government, according to the directions of the new teſtament. In ſuch an extenſive church, it would be impoſſible, in many caſes, for an offended brother to obtain ſatisfaction, or treat the offender as an heathen man and a publican; for the offender might appeal to a preſbytery, and from that body to a provincial ſynod, and thence to a national or œcumenical council. In all theſe ſtages of a proceſs there would neceſſarily be delays, ſo that one man's life would ſcarcely be long enough to bring a matter to an iſſue. The diſcipline which Chriſt has appointed in his churches is plain, natural and eaſy, and was never deſigned to be clogged by ſuch protractive impediments.

CHAPTER IV.

Of a Particular Church.

IN the preceding chapter the ſcriptural idea of a viſible church has been given. In this ſome farther obſervations concerning the nature and deſign of ſuch a ſociety, the qualifications of its members, and the terms and mode of admiſſion will be added.

A poſitive inſtitution of a viſible church is not found among the inſtructions of Chriſt. The aſſociation of the ſaints, which is the eſſence of of a church, naturally ariſes from that mutual love which ſubſiſts between them. Thoſe who love Chriſt will be inclined to unite, in order to edify one another, make a vigorous ſtand againſt the enemies of Chriſt and his cauſe, and exhibit their light to the beſt advantage before mankind. It is a dictate of natural reaſon, that a lighted candle ſhould not be covered or concealed, but placed on a candleſtick to give light to thoſe who need it. This plain ſimilitude, uſed by Chriſt, is adapted to teach his diſciples, who are the light of the world, to unite with a church, that their light may ſhine before men. A church is emblematically repreſented by a candleſtick.

The preceding obſervations give ſuch an idea of the nature and deſign of a viſible church, as de-

termines the qualifications or terms of communion, which are requiſite in its members.

Thoſe who are the light of the world, or who have true light to exhibit before men, are the proper perſons to compoſe churches. This character is the only requiſite qualification in the ſight of God, and the viſibility of this is the only term of admiſſion in the ſight of men. Chriſtians are bound to receive all thoſe into their charity and communion, whom, they have viſible evidence that Chriſt has received. For it is a plain direction of the apoſtle, *Receive ye one another as Chriſt alſo received us.**

A viſible church of Chriſt muſt, therefore, conſiſt of viſible ſaints, or of thoſe, who, in a judgment of charity, appear to be true believers. Viſibility is the appearance of reality, and viſible ſaints are ſuch as appear to be real ſaints. The churches mentioned in the new teſtament, were called churches of the ſaints, and were evidently compoſed of thoſe who appeared to be ſuch. To receive into viſible churches, thoſe who give no evidence of a cordial and vital union to Chriſt, is inconſiſtent with the direction to love the brethren, ſo frequently urged in the word of God. The members of viſible churches are, in the ſtyle of ſcripture, called brethren, and as ſuch we are commanded to love them. But we cannot exerciſe brotherly affection towards thoſe

* *Rom.* xv. 7.

who give no evidence of conformity to truth, or the image of Chriſt. The diſtinction which the ſcripture makes between the members of churches, and the men of the world, ſuppoſes, that the former are conſidered as friends of Chriſt, and the latter as belonging to a different and oppoſite ſociety, viz. the kingdom of Satan. This diſtinction is clearly marked and urged by the apoſtle, in his directions to the church at Corinth. *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what concord hath Chriſt with Belial? and what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God.**

Thus far the way is clear. But there is more difficulty in determining preciſely what conſtitutes that viſible evidence, by which members ſhould be admitted into communion in the churches. The whole may be compriſed in three things, viz. Orthodoxy, a good profeſſion, and a regular, moral and religious conduct. But each of theſe, eſpecially the firſt and laſt, may open a wide field for controverſy; and different perſons will put different conſtructions upon the terms. This difficulty is obvious in theory. But churches conſtituted on a ſcriptural plan, agreed in the ſole term of communion which has been mentioned, and influenced by a genuine ſpirit of chriſtian charity, will general-

* 2 *Cor.* vi. 14, 15, 16.

ly find it eaſier to act, than to preſcribe, in unexceptionable terms, particular rules for action.

It is of importance that the members of churches ſhould be intimately acquainted with each other. For this purpoſe, it is generally expedient that candidates for admiſſion, ſhould be examined in the preſence of the brethren, and give an account of their religious ſentiments and exerciſes, that the church may have the beſt information reſpecting their principles and views, and act with the greateſt clearneſs and freedom in admitting or rejecting them. When candidates are examined by the paſtor only, and propounded to the church, they are too often admitted to communion without that intimate acquaintance with the brethren, which is neceſſary for the exerciſe of brotherly love, free religious converſation, and the performance of thoſe peculiar duties, which their mutual relation requires.

The primitive, or apoſtolic churches, appear to have been collected by the preaching of the goſpel, and cemented by the bonds of charity; and there is no evidence that a formal or explicit covenant was uſed among them. Their mutual obligations were clearly pointed out by the inſtructions and exhortations of their miniſters, and recogniſed in their ſocial worſhip and communion at the Lord's table. In theſe tranſactions was implied a mutual covenant between the members of a particular church, to unite in

the obſervance of the ordinances of Chriſt, and treat one another as brethren according to his laws and directions. This is the eſſence of a church covenant, and is neceſſarily underſtood in the exiſtence of a church. And in the preſent ſtate of religion and the churches, it appears important that ſuch a covenant ſhould be expreſſed and acknowledged by a particular form, that the mutual obligations of chriſtian brethren may be clearly defined and publicly manifeſted.

There may be ſufficient reaſons for a member of a church to remove ſo far from his brethren, that he cannot perform thoſe duties towards them, or receive that aſſiſtance and benefit from them, which the mutual relation of church-members requires. But charity would naturally ſuggeſt the propriety of obtaining, in ſuch caſes, the approbation and conſent of the church; and when this is done, the removing member ſhould receive a certificate of his memberſhip and ſtanding, and a recommendation to ſome other church, with which he may conveniently unite; but ſhould never be diſmiſſed from one church until he is actually received by another. To diſmiſs a church-member into the wide world, is to diſmiſs him into the viſible kingdom of Satan.

A viſible church may exiſt without officers. Chriſtian aſſemblies, in the apoſtle's time, were called churches; for we read, "They ordained

"them elders in every church."* Churches in this unorganized ſtate, may have the power which naturally belongs to every voluntary ſociety as ſuch. They may admit members; for they have a natural right to join with whom they pleaſe. They may chooſe officers; this is the right of every free ſociety, and appears to have been exerciſed by thoſe infant churches, in which the apoſtles are ſaid to have ordained elders. For the words may be rendered, they ordained them elders by vote, that is, by the conſent or choice of the churches. They have alſo power to diſcipline and excommunicate diſorderly members: for every voluntary ſociety may determine for themſelves, whom they will retain in their fellowſhip; and ſurely thoſe who are combined in oppoſition to all wickedneſs, and commanded to come out from among the wicked and be ſeparate, may withdraw from every brother who walketh diſorderly. In all theſe caſes, however, it may be expedient to ſeek the advice and aſſiſtance of ſome able miniſter or miniſters, who may be qualified to preſide and lead the churches to act regularly according to the rules of Chriſt. For churches, without proper officers, ſhould always be ſenſible, that ſome important things are wanting, which muſt be ſet in order before they will be in a complete ſtate, and properly furniſhed in every reſpect to execute the laws, and obſerve the ordinances of Chriſt.

* *Acts* xiv. 23.

CHAPTER V.

Of Religious Converſation.

RELIGION conſiſts eſſentially in inward exerciſes. A religious profeſſion, and good external conduct, may be the fruit of religion, but is not properly religion itſelf. Tho' right exerciſes and affections of heart are known only to him who ſeeth in ſecret, yet they exiſt in every ſaint. Thoſe inward exerciſes and affections, which are eſſential to real religion, may be called chriſtian experiences, and make an important ſubject of goſpel preaching.

Experimental religion is often a ſubject of ſpeculation in ſermons and converſation; and matter of zealous and pathetic exhortation in many public addreſſes. But a free communication of inward exerciſes and feelings, is, among many profeſſors, neglected, and perhaps diſcountenanced. Free converſation of this kind, is conſidered by ſome as a mark of enthuſiaſm or pride. Hence, in ſome churches, which are compoſed of profeſſors of real religion, the members have no intimate converſation with each other about their inward exerciſes.

On the other hand, ſome ſtrongly advocate and encourage the relation of chriſtian experience, and conſider it as an edifying branch of religious converſation. But their ideas of the

ſubject appear to be very contracted. They ſeem to confine themſelves chiefly to thoſe exerciſes, which have ſenſibly paſſed in their minds about the time of their ſuppoſed converſion. Such experiences, as they call them, are often repeated, and conſidered as the beſt evidences of the reality of religion to themſelves and others. If ſuch exerciſes may be called chriſtian experiences at all, they are certainly of the loweſt order, and conſequently, moſt confuſed and indiſtinct. It would be as reaſonable to determine the real character of a man, by the hiſtory of his actions in a ſtate of childhood, as to determine the reality of religion by a relation of ſuch experiences.

In free and intimate converſation about experimental religion, there is doubtleſs need of caution and diſcretion; and ſo there is in the practice of every duty: but if religion conſiſts eſſentially in inward experience and affections, why ſhould not theſe, at proper times, be the ſubject of free converſation among chriſtians? Why ſhould we not communicate them, one to another? Is not the doctrine of the bible moſt clearly exemplified in the inward exerciſes of real chriſtians? And has not a free and ſerious relation of what God has done for the ſouls of his people, a tendency to promote a ſweet fellowſhip between the ſaints, and to ſtimulate and provoke to love and good works? The directions of the bible to brotherly love, the endearing appellations uſed by the apoſtles, and the intima-

cy manifeſted in the conduct of the primitive chriſtians towards each other, afford abundant evidence, that free converſation about ſpiritual things, was encouraged in thoſe days, and that thoſe who feared the Lord, ſpoke often one to another.

It has been often obſerved, and is undoubtedly true, that a particular relation of experiences does not exhibit that evidence which ought to be the ground of admiſſion into churches. And hence ſome have ſuppoſed, that candidates for communion ſhould never be examined on this ſubject, at leaſt, that they ſhould never be called upon to give a particular account of their inward exerciſes. But this ſuppoſition, we think, is not well founded. For many reaſons may be given for examining candidates concerning their religious experiences, though it be admitted, that their relation does not directly exhibit the evidence by which their qualifications are to be judged. Such an examination may lead to the beſt and cleareſt diſcovery of the candidate's doctrinal ideas about experimental religion, and with theſe it is of importance that the church ſhould be acquainted. Beſides, a knowledge of the inward exerciſes and experiences of thoſe who are received as brethren, tends to promote an agreeable intimacy between the members of churches, and prepare them mutually to feel and pray for one another with more affection, and a clearer ſenſe of each other's wants. And we may add, that it opens the way for a free

and unreſtrained addreſs to each other on many occaſions which will occur in their brotherly walk, and facilitates a cloſe and pertinent application to each other, in exhorting and provoking to love and good works.

Churches at this day are awfully deficient in the manifeſtations of that mutual love, which diſtinguiſhes the followers of Chriſt. Chriſtians are indeed taught of God to love one another. This affection is an eſſential part of experimental religion; but is either felt by modern profeſſors, in a very low degree, or expreſſed with great timidity and reluctance. It ſeems as if the friends of Chriſt were aſhamed to own that they love one another. Intimate friends are wont to communicate to each other their exerciſes and feelings with unlimited freedom; and ſuch freedom cheriſhes and increaſes their mutual love. And if a holy intimacy ſhould obtain among chriſtian profeſſors, and influence their converſation as it ought, would not their hearts burn within them, while they unboſomed themſelves to each other? Would any thing tend more directly to enkindle in their hearts the latent ſparks of chriſtian affection? The want of this affection among profeſſors, diſaccuſtoms them to religious familiarity; and on the other hand, their ſhyneſs and reſerve tend greatly to extinguiſh the flame and cover the light of brotherly love. No means, therefore, ſeem better adapted to reſtore to the churches that glory which reſults from the genuine ex-

preſſions of chriſtian charity, than to encourage free and intimate converſation about experimental religion. For this reaſon, we think it expedient that religious ſocieties or conferences be promoted, and that other meaſures be taken to cultivate among profeſſors, free converſation, about the exerciſes and feelings which they experience in their own ſouls.

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CHAPTER VI.

Of Brotherly Love.

LOVE is the eſſence of true religion. It has for its object all perceptive beings, according to their capacity, rank and importance. The law of God, which, according to the new covenant, is written on the hearts of his people, is fulfilled in love. This affection, therefore, conſtitutes the diſtinguiſhing ſpirit or moral diſpoſition of all real ſaints.

Benevolence and complacence are both included in love, and both eſſential to the chriſtian character: the former embraces all perceptive beings as its object; the latter, thoſe only who are virtuous.

Holy love is exerciſed and clearly exemplified in that peculiar affection which ſubſiſts between chriſtian brethren, who are taught of God to

love one another. This brotherly affection exhibits, at one view, benevolence and complacence towards God and man, and is the brighteſt and moſt perfect image of that divine love, which has been diſplayed in the redemption of man through a mediator. Redeeming love is therefore propoſed as a pattern for the diſciples of Chriſt, when he gives them his new commandment, *That ye love one another, as I have loved you: that ye alſo love one another.** And becauſe obedience to this commandment is a direct imitation of Chriſt, he repreſents it as an infallible mark of diſcipleſhip; for he adds, *By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples if ye have love one to another.** This affection is often mentioned in the new teſtament as peculiar to the ſaints and often inculcated as an important and eſſential duty under the name of brotherly love.

Brotherly complacence ought to be exerciſed towards thoſe who manifeſt a holy diſpoſition, becauſe they viſibly bear the image of Chriſt: *For every one that loveth him who begat, loveth him alſo who is begotten of him.*† If we love Chriſt, we cannot but love thoſe who are like him. Holineſs is always lovely to thoſe who have a ſpiritual taſte: and therefore to ſuch, *the ſaints of God are the excellent, in whom is all their delight.*‡ As the ſaints are the proper objects of this kind of love, thoſe who moſt abound

* *John*, xiii. 34—35. † 1 *John*, v. 1.
‡ *Pſal.* xvi. 3.

in the viſible fruits of the ſpirit, demand the greateſt ſhare.

Brotherly benevolence ought to be exerciſed towards thoſe who belong to the family of Chriſt, becauſe they are more valuable and important than others. They muſt be conſidered in this light becauſe they are precious to him. He loves them with a peculiar love. They are his friends, for whom he laid down his life, his jewels, his peculiar treaſure, which he hath ſet apart for himſelf. Whatever our dear friends value, we naturally prize for their ſake. If we love Chriſt, we ſhall therefore love thoſe whom he loves. The ſaints are alſo more valuable and important than others, becauſe they are engaged in the purſuit of the greateſt good, and are taking the proper and direct meaſures to promote it. If we wiſh to have the moſt important object advanced, we muſt certainly wiſh all proſperity and ſucceſs to thoſe who are actively engaged to advance it. If we conſider an end valuable, we ſhall value thoſe means and inſtruments, which tend directly to its accompliſhment. Theſe reaſons confirm our obligations to exerciſe particular benevolence towards the people of God, and ſhow the propriety of the apoſtolic direction to "do good to all "men, eſpecially to them who are of the houſ- "hold of faith."*

* *Gal.* vi. 10.

That brotherly love, which has been briefly deſcribed, being eſſentially the ſame mind which was alſo in Chriſt Jeſus, will naturally produce an imitation of him in the viſible and external conduct of its ſubjects. Thoſe who love one another, according to the directions of the goſpel and example of Chriſt, and are ſo ſituated and connected as to have a mutual correſpondence and intercourſe with each other, will exemplify the words of the pſalmiſt, and practically ſhow *how good and how pleaſant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.** They will *put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel againſt any, even as Chriſt forgave them.*† And thoſe who poſſeſs ſuch inward feelings and affections will manifeſt them in their external conduct. They will ſpeak kindly to each other on all occaſions, and naturally uſe ſoft language and endearing appellations. This is evident from the general conduct of intimate friends, and from the practice of the apoſtles and primitive chriſtians. They will cheerfully ſubmit to the meaneſt offices to ſerve their brethren, according to the example of Chriſt, who, in the form and manner of a ſervant, waſhed his diſciples' feet. A tender regard for the reputation of their brethren, will induce them to avoid, with particular caution, all back-biting, evil-ſpeaking, and

* *Pſal.* cxxxiii. 1. † *Col.* iii. 12, 13.

whatever is prejudicial to another's good name. They will delight to aſſiſt their brethren in diſtreſs, and freely communicate of their ſubſtance to relieve the needy ſaints. To viſit the fatherleſs and widow in their affliction, is a genuine expreſſion of pure and undefiled religion.* The performance of ſuch duties, is often repreſented as a manifeſtation of chriſtian love, and the neglect of them as a certain evidence of the want of religion. According to Chriſt's deſcription of the judgment of the great day, the title of the righteous to eternal life, will be evidenced by thoſe charitable deeds, the want of which will conſign the wicked to everlaſting puniſhment.†

Among the fruits of brotherly love, we may add a deſire of intimate ſociety and converſation. Chriſtians, united in heart, will naturally aſſociate and ſpeak often one to another. They will cheerfully and eagerly meet for the worſhip of God, and the management of thoſe affairs which reſpect their common intereſt and the general good, and will delight in all the aſſemblies of the ſaints. We have an inſtance of this in the conduct of the primitive believers, of whom we repeatedly read, that they were all with one accord in the ſame place. To forſake the aſſembling of ourſelves together, as the manner of ſome is, betrays a great deficiency of brotherly love.‡

* *James*, i. 27. † *Mat.* xxv. 34—*end.*
‡ *Heb.* x. 24, 25.

Brotherly exhortation will ſpontaneouſly flow from the ſame ſource. It is often urged upon us as an important duty, and when duly performed, tends greatly to edification in ſpiritual things. If we have a proper regard to the ſpiritual intereſt of our chriſtian brethren, we ſhall not neglect, in this way, to provoke them to love and good works. But that expreſſion of brotherly love, which exceeds all the reſt, is pointed out by the apoſtle John, who, obſerving the wonderful diſplay of the love of God, in his laying down his life for us, infers our obligation to lay down our lives for the brethren.* Great indeed, muſt be that love which produces this effect: but it does not want examples among the primitive ſaints. For Priſcilla and Aquila laid down their necks for Paul's life;† and the apoſtle himſelf, counted not his life dear, in compariſon of the church, for whoſe ſake he was laboring,‡ and was prepared to joy and rejoice with the Philippians, though he was offered upon the ſacrifice and ſervice of their faith.§

The conduct of profeſſion in general, at this day, if compared with the deſcription which has been given of brotherly love, muſt be acknowledged to be exceedingly deficient. The genuine expreſſions of that diſtinguiſhing affection are very rare. Yet real chriſtians certainly love one another. "He that loveth not his brother abideth

* 1 *John*, iii. 16. † *Rom.* xvi. 4.
‡ *Acts*, xx. 24. § *Phil.* ii. 17.

in death."* He is not; cannot be a diſciple of Chriſt. Therefore, the higheſt profeſſion, and the warmeſt zeal, without the fruits of brotherly love, afford no viſible evidence of real religion.

CHAPTER VII.

Of Baptiſm.

CHRIST commanded his diſciples to "teach all nations, baptizing them."† The external adminiſtration of baptiſm, conſiſts in waſhing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt.

Baptiſm was inſtituted for a mark of diſcipleſhip. Thoſe whom John baptized were his diſciples; and thoſe whom Chriſt, or his diſciples, in his name, baptized were his. This is evident from the words of the evangeliſt. "Jeſus made "and baptized more diſciples than John. Tho' "Jeſus himſelf baptized not, but his diſciples."‡ The expreſſions uſed by Chriſt, directing his diſciples to baptize *in*, or "*into* the name of the "Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy "Ghoſt," import diſcipleſhip, which is a compliance with the goſpel, in acknowledging and ſubmitting to the Father, the Son, and the Holy

* 1 *John*, iii. 14. † *Mat.* xxviii. 19.
‡ *John*, iv. 1, 2.

Ghoſt, as co-operating in the great work of redemption. Accordingly, we read, "As many "as have been baptized into Chriſt," that is, into the name of Chriſt, "have put on Chriſt,"* that is, have viſibly taken him for their ſaviour.

Baptiſm ſignifies a cleanſing from ſin. Water is a figure of the Holy Ghoſt, which is ſhed abundantly on the ſubjects of divine grace, to purify them by "the waſhing of regeneration, "even the renewing of the Holy Ghoſt," or "the ſprinkling of the blood of Jeſus Chriſt."† Sin is often compared to filthineſs; when, therefore, water is applied to the ſubjects of baptiſm, it ſignifies that they are by nature unclean, that they need to be waſhed, and that they (at leaſt in the caſe of adults) are waſhed or cleanſed from ſin. This is clear from the words of Ananias to Saul. "Ariſe and be bap-"tized and waſh away thy ſins."‡

The deſign of baptiſm, therefore, is to repreſent our dependance on Chriſt, as he is ſet forth in the goſpel, for cleanſing or ſanctification; and our obligations to be the Lord's, to obey his commandments and walk in newneſs of life. This rite is therefore to be conſidered as a viſible introduction into the church, and thoſe who are baptized, according to the rules of Chriſt, are to be viewed and treated, as members of his inviſible body.

* *Gal.* iii. 27. † *Tit.* iii. 5, *and* 1 *Pet.* i. 2.
‡ *Acts*, xxii. 16.

The infants of believers are proper ſubjects of baptiſm. For God formerly commanded, that children ſhould be dedicated to him, and has never revoked that commandment. God's covenant with Abraham included his children: and the ſame covenant is made with all thoſe who believe, who are the ſeed of Abraham, and bleſſed with the ſame bleſſings with him. Their children, therefore, are to be conſidered as included in the covenant and belonging to God, and conſequently, ought to receive the ſeal of that covenant, as Abraham's children did. The promiſes which abound in the ſcripture to the righteous, reſpecting their ſeed, confirm the bleſſings of Abraham to the children of believers, and ſhow the propriety of baptizing infants, as owned and claimed by him, who makes thoſe gracious promiſes to his people. And the declaration which Chriſt made concerning little children, when he took them in his arms and bleſſed them, proves, that they are conſidered as related to the goſpel church; for he ſaid, with reference to thoſe children, "Of ſuch is the king-"dom of heaven."* And ſince the kingdom of heaven is the goſpel church, and baptiſm is appointed to diſtinguiſh its members, it follows, that thoſe infants, who belong to the kingdom, ought to be baptized. Beſides, the epithet *holy*, when applied to the children of believers, can certainly import nothing leſs, than that they ought to be conſecrated to God.†

* *Mat.* xix. 14. † 1 *Cor.* vii. 14.

Baptized children, when they come to years of diſcretion, and are capable of conſideration and reflection, ſhould feel that they are under ſpecial obligations to God. They have been devoted to him by their parents, and viſibly belong to him. Their viſible relation to God, ought to be viewed, as a ſolemn obligation to devote themſelves to him, and obey his commandments; as Samuel, who was the fruit of his mother's prayer, and was conſecrated to God by her vow, was under ſpecial obligations to be faithful to him, to whoſe ſervice he had been devoted.

Parents who dedicate their children to God in baptiſm, do, by that ſolemn tranſaction, practically embrace the gracious promiſes of God, reſpecting the ſeed of the righteous, and take God for their God and the God of their ſeed: and this implies the moſt ſolemn acknowledgment of their obligations to "bring up their "children in the nurture and admonition of "the Lord."

To thoſe who view the doctrine of baptiſm, as it has been briefly ſtated, it will appear palpably inconſiſtent, to baptize any adults, who do not give evidence of cordial love to Chriſt and the truth, or any infants, unleſs one of their parents appears to be a real believer.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of the Lord's Supper.

AT the close of the last passover, which Christ kept with his disciples, and just before his passion, he instituted the supper, to be observed by his followers, as a memorial of his death.

The supper consists of bread and the cup, which were appointed by Christ to represent his body and blood, or the great atonement, in which his body was broken, and his blood shed, for the remission of sin.

The blessing which preceded the distribution of the bread, and the thanksgiving over the cup, manifest our dependance on God, and our obligations to give thanks, for the atonement by Christ, and all the spiritual blessings which are conferred on us, according to the riches of divine grace, through a mediator. The blessing and tanksgiving, appear not to be essentially different: for the same transaction, which is called blessing by Matthew and Mark, is called thanksgiving by Luke and Paul. Thanksgiving, therefore, implied blessing, and blessing thanksgiving, and both were essentially the same act of worship.

The bread and cup are not to be used as common food and drink, to satisfy the carnal appe-

tite, or to nouriſh and refreſh the body; but are to be conſidered as ſenſible ſigns, adapted to ſuggeſt and impreſs on our minds, ideas of ſpiritual things. They may, indeed, be ſaid to be ſet apart for this end: but there is no more reaſon to ſay that they are conſecrated or ſet apart by thankſgiving and bleſſing, from a common to a ſacred uſe, than that our daily bread is in the ſame way ſet apart to a common uſe. Chriſt bleſſed and gave thanks over food on other occaſions, as well as at the inſtitution of the ſupper. In both caſes there was a ſeparation of food for a particular uſe. But, as in common caſes, the ſeparation depends on the will or deſign of the partakers; ſo in the Lord's ſupper, the ſeparation of the bread and the cup depends on the intention of Chriſt, and of thoſe who duly obſerve that ſacred inſtitution.

The diſtribution of the bread and cup among the communicants, ſuggeſts the diffuſion of grace, and ſpiritual bleſſings from Chriſt, the head to all the members of his body; and the commandment to eat and drink, manifeſts our obligations to receive thoſe bleſſings and derive our ſupplies from him. Thoſe who obey this commandment, eat the fleſh and drink the blood of the ſon of man. And the direction to do this, in remembrance of Chriſt, is binding upon all his followers, and ſhows the importance of their keeping in mind, the atonement by Chriſt, which is the foundation of all their hope of acceptance with God and eternal life.

It ſeems to be requiſite in the celebration of the Lord's ſupper, that a number ſhould partake together. The *diſciples came together to break bread.** The ſupper is a communion, or joint participation of the body and blood of Chriſt. *The cup of bleſſing which we bleſs, is it not the communion of the blood of Chriſt? The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Chriſt? For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.*† The joint participation of many at the Lord's table, expreſſes unity of faith and ſpirit. They all believe in the ſame ſaviour, and receive their ſupplies from the ſame ſtore. They are like brethren of the ſame family, who meet and receive their food together, from their father's table; or like friends who expreſs their love to one another, at a ſocial feaſt. Envy, diſcord, contention, and whatever is repugnant to brotherly love, are therefore inconſiſtent with that communion, which is expreſſed at the Lord's ſupper; and when they prevail, and ſo long as they continue among brethren, tend to deſtroy that unity which is repreſented by their being all one bread and one body. In ſuch caſes a church cannot properly unite in obſerving the Lord's ſupper, but ought to *purge out the old leaven that they may be a new lump.*‡

As the Lord's ſupper exhibits, in a ſymbolical way, the great doctrine of the atonement by

* *Acts*, xx. 7. † 1 *Cor.* x. 16, 17. ‡ 1 *Cor.* v. 7.

Chriſt; ſo it involves and compriſes the eſſence of all evangelical truth, and implies in its celebration, a profeſſion of unfeigned faith in Chriſt crucified, a cordial approbation of his doctrine, and ſubjection to his laws. And as none but real chriſtians, who are "created anew in Chriſt Jeſus unto good works," and effectually "taught "of God to love the brethren," can ſincerely, and conſiſtently make ſuch a profeſſion: ſo none but thoſe who appear to be ſuch, can with propriety be admitted to the communion of the ſupper, in which all the communicants are repreſented as "one bread and one body."

CHAPTER IX.

Of Church-Officers.

WHEN our Saviour aſcended on high, he gave for the work of the miniſtry, apoſtles, prophets, evangeliſts, paſtors and teachers.* Of theſe the apoſtles and prophets were extraordinary. The former were ſpecial witneſſes of the reſurrection of Chriſt, having actually ſeen the riſen Saviour. Thus Paul, aſſerting his apoſtleſhip, ſays, "Am I not an apoſtle? Have "I not ſeen Chriſt?"† The latter, the prophets, were endowed with extraordinary gifts, and ſeem to have been appointed to predict future

* *Eph.* iv. 8, 11. † 1 *Cor.* ix. 1.

events, confirm the truth of the goſpel, and compleat the canon of ſcripture. Both theſe orders of miniſters, having performed the work for which they were appointed and qualified, were no longer continued in the church.

Evangeliſts are named, among the miniſters appointed by Chriſt. Their buſineſs appears to have been, to ſpread the goſpel in the world, enlighten the heathen, and gather and organize churches. For theſe purpoſes, they, like the apoſtles, travelled into diſtant countries, and labored, wherever a door was opened, for the converſion of ſinners and the edification of the ſaints.

Some have ſuppoſed, without any ſufficient ground, that the order of evangeliſts was temporary, and ceaſed with thoſe of the apoſtles and prophets. This ſuppoſition is not only arbitrary, as being without ſcriptural foundation, but is rendered improbable, by the employment aſſigned to evangeliſts, the nature and deſign of their office, and the importance and neceſſity of ſuch laborers in the harveſt of Chriſt. There always has been, and ſtill is, a great call for itinerant miniſters. They ſeem to be peculiarly adapted to rouſe the attention of a ſtupid and ignorant world, and promote an extenſive propagation of evangelical truth. If chriſtians at this day were affected, as they ought to be, with the deplorable ſtate of mankind, in the regions of paganiſm, and were induced to make vigorous

exertions to ſpread the favor of divine knowledge among them, the importance and neceſſity of the office and order of evangeliſts, would appear more ſtrikingly evident.

Biſhops, *elders*, *paſtors*, and *teachers*, are the miniſters who ſtatedly exerciſe their office, in a particular viſible church. Theſe terms are generally uſed promiſcuouſly to expreſs the ſame office. He who is a biſhop, is an elder and paſtor, and he who is a paſtor, is a biſhop and elder. The word teacher, appears not to denote a different office, but may diſtinguiſh a biſhop, whoſe peculiar gift and employment was teaching; though every biſhop muſt be apt to teach. Perhaps the word *elder*, may be applied to evangeliſts, as it was to apoſtles, though commonly uſed to deſignate the biſhops or paſtors of particular churches.

From the ſcripture account, it appears highly probable, if not certain, that there was a number of elders in every primitive church. It was evidently ſo in the church at Epheſus.* The apoſtles ordained elders in every church.† Titus was directed to ordain elders in every city of Crete.‡ Paul, writing to the Philippians, addreſſes the biſhops who appear to belong to that church. And no inſtance can be found in the ſacred hiſtory, of an organized church with a ſingle biſhop.

* *Acts*, xx. 17. † *Acts*, xiv. 23. ‡ *Tit.* i. 5.

The learned and impartial *Moſheim* gives this account of the churches in the firſt century. "Such was the conſtitution of the chriſtian "church in its infancy, when its aſſemblies "were neither numerous nor ſplendid. Three "or four preſbyters, men of remarkable piety "and wiſdom, ruled theſe ſmall congregations "in perfect harmony; nor did they ſtand in "need of any preſident or ſuperior to maintain "concord and order, where no diſſenſions were "known."*

The elders of the primitive churches, were all biſhops and paſtors, and therefore equal in office. This appears from Paul's addreſs to the elders of the church at Epheſus. *Take heed unto yourſelves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghoſt hath made you overſeers*, that is, biſhops, *to feed the church of God*, that is, to perform the office of paſtors to the church.† But though theſe elders were equal in office, yet, being endowed with different gifts, they were probably differently employed. This appears natural, reaſonable, and agreeable to the apoſtle's direction. *Having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether peophecy*, let us prophecy *according to the proportion of faith: Or miniſtry*, let us wait *on our miniſtering, or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation.*‡— With this idea, the hiſtorian juſt quoted, in de-

* *Moſheim's Eccl. Hiſt. Cent.* 1, *P.* 2, *C.* 2.
† *Acts*, xx. 28. ‡ *Rom.* xii. 6, 7, 8.

ſcribing the miniſters of the firſt century, exactly agrees. His words are, "The rulers of the "church were called either preſbyters or biſh-, "ops, which two titles are, in the new teſta- "ment, undoubtedly applied to the ſame order "of men. Their particular functions were not "always the ſame; for while ſome of them "confined their labors to the inſtruction of the "people, others contributed, in different ways, "to the edification of the church."*

The particular diſtribution of miniſterial labor among the elders, is not clearly marked in the word of God, and probably was not fixed in the practice of the primitive churches. For there is reaſon to believe, that the uſe and application of thoſe gifts, which were found in any church, were ſubject, from time to time, to regulation and change, that they might be moſt conducive to edification, and conſiſtent with the rules of decency and order. It is probable, therefore, that the primitive biſhops all ruled or preſided in their churches, were all apt to teach in a public or private way, and all more or leſs qualified to exhort. Yet one might be eſpecially a ruler, having gifts ſuited to that employment, and ſo be directed to *rule with diligence:* Another might be eſpecially a teacher, whoſe buſineſs it was to *wait on teaching;* another, eſpecially an exhorter, being beſt qualified to edify the church, and promote the cauſe of

* *Moſheim's Eccl. Hiſt. Cent.* 1, *P.* 2, *C.* 2.

religion in that way, and ſo be appointed to *wait on exhortation.* This diſtribution of paſtoral work is very natural, and appears to agree with the apoſtolic exhortation, in which theſe ſeveral employments are diſtinctly mentioned.

Ruling, teaching, and exhorting, compriſe the eſſential duties of the paſtoral office, exerciſed according to ſcripture, in the churches of the ſaints: and there is much reaſon to think, that theſe duties were, in primitive times, diſtributed among ſeveral paſtors, in ſome ſuch manner as has been repreſented. Several elders in one church, equal in office, but different in gifts, and accordingly differently employed, would conſtitute a preſbytery: and ſuch an arrangement ſeems to be well adapted to anſwer the important ends of the goſpel miniſtry.

The external form and organization of modern churches, undoubtedly differ, in many reſpects, from the apoſtolic plan. And the introduction of primitive modes, would be oppoſed by many, as alarming innovations. Should religion revive, and chriſtian ſimplicity and integrity prevail, and deſtroy the influence of pride, external pomp, and ſecular policy, a reformation would be eaſily effected: But how far we ought to attempt to reduce our churches, prejudiced as they are, to the primitive form; or what meaſures ought to be taken for that purpoſe, may be difficult to determine. But ſuch enqui-

ries deſerve the ſerious attention of thoſe who wiſh well to the Redeemer's cauſe.

A plurality of elders, in every church, may not be abſolutely neceſſary for the performance of the work of the miniſtry, and the exerciſe of goſpel diſcipline. One elder may be ſo far qualified to rule, teach, and exhort, that with the aſſiſtance of other brethren, according to their gifts, he may perform the paſtoral work to good purpoſe. A church, not ſo completely furniſhed with officers, as might be deſired, ought to uſe all the gifts, which it has for edification. But the gifts of private brethren, muſt, with reſpect to the time, manner, and degree of their exerciſe, be ſubject to the direction, and control of the paſtors and churches where they are found. Any church, therefore, for the aſſiſtance, and with the conſent of their paſtor or paſtors, may deſire thoſe members who are properly qualified to pray, viſit, exhort, catechiſe or teach with ſuch latitude or limitation, as circumſtances may require. But it would be criminally imprudent and diſorderly, for any member of a church, to ſet up himſelf as a public leader, inſtructor, or exhorter, without the approbation of the body.

Ruling elders have been conſidered, by ſome, as an order of church-officers diſtinct from biſhops; but no ſuch order is mentioned or deſcribed in the word of God: Nor is there any reaſon to believe that ſuch elders were known in the

primitive churches. For Paul, writing to Timothy, that he might know how he ought to behave in the houſe of God, gives him directions how to furniſh the churches with proper officers, and particularly mentions, the qualifications of biſhops and deacons;* but takes no notice of ruling elders, as a diſtinct order. And when the ſame apoſtle writes to the church, at Philippi, and expreſsly directs his epiſtle to all the ſaints there, with the biſhops and deacons, no mention is made of ruling elders.† The bare omiſſion of ſuch an important order, as that of ruling elders is ſuppoſed to be, and that by Paul, under ſuch circumſtances as are preſented in theſe paſſages, is ſo unaccountable, that it affords ground of ſtrong preſumption, that no ſuch order exiſted in the primitive churches.

But it will be alledged, that Paul plainly diſtinguiſhes between the orders of ruling and teaching elders, when he writes to Timothy, *Let the elders that rule well be accounted worthy of double honor, eſpecially thoſe who labor in word and doctrine.*‡ In reply to this, it may be obſerved, that the apoſtle ſpeaks of no elders but thoſe who rule, and the ſuppoſed diſtinction, between two orders of elders, will vaniſh, if we conſider the words as a direction to treat miniſters, who are to be eſteemed highly for their work's ſake, with a reſpect proportioned to their diligence and zeal in performing the duties of their office.

* 1 *Tim.* iii. † *Phil.* i. 1. ‡ 1 *Tim.* v. 17.

The obſervations which have been made concerning biſhops and elders, afford an eaſy interpretation of the text, without admitting the ſuppoſition of two diſtinct orders. For, if all the elders, in every church, were rulers, teachers, and exhorters, and were differently employed, according to their ſeveral gifts, thoſe who labored in word and doctrine, might be entitled to "double honor," whatever may be intended by the phraſe, on account of the conſtant appropriation of their time, and the weight of their employment, though their office or order were not diſtinct.

Evangeliſts have been mentioned among the miniſters, which Chriſt has appointed, as an order diſtinct from paſtors. This diſtinction reſults from their different employment, and more extenſive field of labor, and ſeems evidently to be authorized by the apoſtolic ſtyle. For Paul, writing to the Epheſians, diſtinctly enumerates the ſeveral orders of miniſters, appointed by Chriſt. "He gave ſome apoſtles, and ſome prophets, and ſome evangeliſts, and ſome paſtors and teachers."* The diſtinction between evangeliſts and paſtors, is not, however, that of rank, authority or precedence. In theſe reſpects, thoſe different orders are equal. Evangeliſts, may therefore become paſtors, and paſtors evangeliſts, when circumſtances require it, without degradation or promotion. A biſhop, without

* *Eph.* iv. 11.

a particular charge, may and ought to do the work of an evangeliſt, and is, ſtrictly ſpeaking, no longer a biſhop: And an evangeliſt may take the charge of a particular flock, and perform the ſervice which belongs to the office of a biſhop; and, in this caſe, he cannot properly be called an evangeliſt.

Among the officers of a particular church, we muſt not omit to mention deacons. That ſuch an order exiſted, in the apoſtolic churches, is very clear from ſcripture. Paul, in his epiſtle to Timothy, particularly mentions their qualifications; but their particular employment ſeems not to be eaſily aſcertained. The name deacon, ſignifies a miniſter or ſervant; and in this ſenſe, is indiſcriminately applied to any, who ſerved in the goſpel of Chriſt. But what particular ſervice was aſſigned to thoſe church-officers, who appear to be diſtinguiſhed by this appropriated name, is matter of doubt and controverſy. Many have ſuppoſed, that the ſeven men, appointed in the church of Jeruſalem, to "ſerve tables,"* were deacons; but they are not, in ſcripture, called by that name. Yet, from the occaſion and circumſtances of that appointment, the need and propriety of ſuch an order of miniſters in the churches, and ſome corroborating conſiderations, it has been generally believed, with at leaſt ſome degree of probability, that the buſineſs of deacons, is to take care of the temperalities of the

* *Acts*, vi.

church, overſee the diſtribution of their alms, for the ſupply of the poor, and provide for the Lord's table, the ſupport of officers, and other neceſſary expenſes, out of the treaſury of the church.

Both ſcripture and reaſon, recogniſe the right of the churches to chooſe their own officers. For any man, or body of men, to impoſe officers upon a church, by dint of authority, is oppreſſive, tyrannical, and palpably inconſiſtent with the ſpirit of the chriſtian religion. This being admitted, the mode and means of ordination, or induction to office, will not appear to be matter of the greateſt concern. But the propriety of a regular and ſolemn method of deſignating, and ſetting apart men to the labor of the goſpel, is ſuggeſted by the importance, and ſanctity of miniſterial employment, and confirmed by the ſcripture account of the apoſtolic practice. To conſider particularly the various opinions, which have been advanced on the altercated ſubject of ordination, does not coincide with our preſent deſign. It may ſuffice to obſerve, that we are fully perſuaded, that church-officers ought to be ſolemnly ordained, and that ordination ſhould be performed by ordained elders, with prayer and impoſition of hands.

CHAPTER X.

Of Church-Government and Diſcipline.

NO human ſociety, in this imperfect ſtate, can well ſubſiſt without government. It is therefore reaſonable to expect, that the wiſe and merciful Redeemer, ſhould make proviſion for his churches in this reſpect. Accordingly we find, that on this ſubject, he has given his people directions, which are eaſy to be underſtood and obſerved, and perfectly adapted to the nature of chriſtian ſocieties.

The directions of Chriſt, reſpecting government and diſcipline, are given directly to individuals, or particular churches; and are evidently deſigned to regulate the conduct of one chriſtian aſſembly and its members. To every viſible church of Chriſt, the entire right of government excluſively belongs: ſo that, in this reſpect, one has no authority to control another.

Though a viſible church, in an unorganized ſtate, may, in ſome meaſure, execute the laws of diſcipline, which Chriſt has appointed, yet it is not prepared for the moſt ample and regular adminiſtration of government, without its proper officers. Order cannot generally be well preſerved, without leaders or rulers. Such, therefore, had a place in the primitive churches: for they are directed to *remember and obey them*

who ruled over them:* and we read of the *elders that ruled well*. It is true that these rulers had no right to exercise authority or dominion over the churches. They were, as the original words import, to stand foremost among the brethren, and lead them to understand, and execute the laws of Christ. To explain the word of truth; to receive accusations, when properly brought; to propose subjects, and preside in the deliberations of the church; to moderate, and instruct in matters of order and regularity; to take evidence, and lead the brethren to an understanding, candid and scriptural judgment and decision of the cases regularly brought before them; to admonish in their name, and administer or declare their censures, are the duties of those rulers, to whom the churches are directed to submit.

Our Lord has given a plain and easy rule, to direct the proceeding of christian brethren, in cases of offence.† The first step is private admonition. *If thy brother trespass or sin against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.* This law is evidently dictated by brotherly love, and ought to be observed with meekness, moderation, and charity. The conviction, repentance, and spiritual good of the offender, must be sought, as the grand object; and to promote this, the matter, and manner of the admonition, must be studiously adapted. If this measure is attended with success, the penitent

* *Heb.* xiii. 7, 17. † *Mat.* xviii.

offender muſt be cordially and joyfully forgiven and received.

But if the admonition is ineffectual, and the offender obſtinate, the next ſtep in the proceſs is directed in theſe words; *Take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witneſſes every word may be eſtabliſhed.* The perſons choſen to give weight to the admonition, and be witneſſes of the tranſaction between the brethren, ought to be furniſhed with ſuch gifts and reputation, as will give them the greateſt advantage to perſuade, and influence the offender to his duty. Theſe aſſociates in the work of admonition, muſt have knowledge or proof of the facts, in which the crime or treſpaſs conſiſts. And while they endeavor to promote repentance or reconciliation, muſt obſerve the conduct of the accuſer and offender, and be ready to teſtify, if needful, the circumſtances and event of the tranſaction. All proceeding in this, as well as in the former ſtep, muſt be marked with meekneſs and love: and the offender, if convinced and penitent, muſt be cheerfully, and fully reſtored.

But if the offender continue obſtinate and impenitent, the accuſer is commanded to tell it to the church. This is the laſt ſtep in the proceſs. The church, being acquainted with the caſe, muſt add their admonitions to the former meaſures, and reſtore, or reject, according to the evidence, which the offender exhibits of re-

pentance or obſtinacy. In the latter caſe, the direction to the accuſer is, *Let him be to thee as an heathen man, and a publican.*

The rules of diſcipline, preſcribed by Chriſt, reſpect thoſe caſes, in which the crime of the offender may be proved by two or three witneſſes. But if the offence is known to the offended brother only, it is wrong in him to tell it to another. He may ſolemnly admoniſh the offender, and endeavor, by all private means, to convince him of his crime, and bring him to repentance; but has no right to take the ſecond ſtep, unleſs he can produce ſcriptural evidence of the fact. He who publiſhes the crime of his brother, which he knows is incapable of proof, is liable to be diſciplined, and cenſured as a ſlanderer; and if he perſiſts in it, after proper admonition, muſt be excommunicated, like other incorrigible offenders.

As an offended brother may not publiſh a private offence, ſo he has no right to withdraw from the communion of the church, on that account. This practice, too common in churches, has no warrant or countenance from the word of God. According to the direction of Chriſt, it is incumbent on the offender, conſcious of his guilt, to be reconciled to his brother: but the faithful followers of Chriſt, muſt never be debarred, by the wicked conduct of diſorderly members, from communion with God and one another, in goſpel ordinances.

According to preceding obſervations, it is ſcriptural, and therefore deſirable, that there ſhould be a preſbytery, or a number of elders in every church. Theſe are the rulers, or leaders, who are often mentioned in the new teſtament. But in the primative churches, theſe rulers managed nothing of common concern, without the conſent of the brethren. According to the directions of Paul, the church of Corinth muſt be gathered together, in order to excommunicate the inceſtuous fornicator.* The brethren in the church at Jeruſalem, were called together to elect the overſeers of their alms.† They convened, and joined with the apoſtles and elders, in forming and determining thoſe noted decrees, which were ſent from Jeruſalem to the gentile churches.‡ And the directions in ſcripture, concerning diſcipline, plainly manifeſt, that the execution of the laws of Chriſt, was committed to the churches. Therefore, a particular viſible church, conſtituted according to the ſcriptural pattern, with its elders, or preſbytery, may decide in all caſes of diſcipline; and its deciſion cannot be lawfully reverſed, by any juriſdiction under heaven. The great head of the church, in his directions concerning diſcipline, neither warrants, nor permits, an appeal from the judgment of a particular church. If ſuch a church rejects an offender, according to the rules of the goſpel, all chriſtians are bound to treat him as an heathen man and a publican. And though

* 1 *Cor.* v. 4. † *Acts*, vi. ‡ *Acts*, xv.

churches may err in their judgment, they are accountable for their conduct in the court of heaven only. This is a plain and juſt inference, from the ſolemn declaration, annexed by Chriſt, to his directions concerning the ſeveral ſteps of diſcipline—*Verily I ſay unto you, whatſoever ye bind on earth ſhall be bound in heaven; and whatſoever ye ſhall looſe on earth ſhall be looſed in heaven.**

Though no appeal lies from the judgment of a particular church, and its preſbytery, to any higher judicature on this ſide of heaven; yet, in difficult caſes, and when doubts, diſunion, and diſſatisfaction prevail in a church, or individuals are grieved or offended, on account of any particular deciſion, it may be prudent to aſk advice; for *in the multitude of counſellors there is ſafety.*† Whether this is done by calling a council of elders and delegates from the neighboring churches, to hear and adviſe in the caſe, or by calling one or more miniſters, or private brethren, or both, to hold forth light, from the word of God, and deliberate with the church, as the ſcripture gives no particular directions, muſt be determined according to circumſtances.

As churches have a right to chooſe their own officers, ſo they muſt be allowed to diſmiſs them, if neceſſary. Scandalous paſtors, or deacons, being members of the churches in which they officiate, are ſubject to diſcipline, and may cen-

* *Mat.* xviii. 18. † *Prov.* xi. 14.

ſured, or excommunicated, if the honor of religion, or the rules of Chriſt require it: yet, in caſes of this kind, it will be expedient to obtain the advice of neighboring elders and churches, eſpecially if the churches, in which ſuch caſes happen, have not preſbyteries in themſelves.

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CHAPTER XI.

Of Eccleſiaſtical Cenſures.

WHEN the previous meaſures, which Chriſt has directed, have been taken with a treſpaſſing or offending brother, and an accuſation is properly and regularly brought before the church, and the offender convicted, by full and unexceptionable evidence, the next ſtep in the proceſs is ſolemn admonition. This ſhould be addreſſed to the offender by the paſtor, or moderator of the meeting, in the name of the brethren. The admonition of the church, may be called the firſt cenſure, and ought to be adminiſtered with charity, moderation and tenderneſs; and at the ſame time, with a firm and decided diſapprobation of the offender's crime. The nature and aggravation of the offence, muſt be clearly and ſcripturally pointed out; and the offender ſhould be exhorted to repent, and, if the caſe requires it, to make reſtitution according to the rules of the goſpel. And if he hear the church, comply with their exhortation, and give credible

evidence of repentance, he muſt be immediately reſtored. But there can be no ſufficient evidence of repentance, without a cheerful performance of that, which is neceſſary, for removing the offence, and making reſtitution, in caſe of perſonal injury.

If evidence of repentance is not immediately manifeſted, it may be expedient, and in ſome caſes requiſite, that the church ſhould allow the offender ſome reaſonable time for reflection and conſideration, before they proceed to public cenſure or excommunication; for the perſon admoniſhed muſt refuſe to hear the church, before he can be treated as an heathen man and a publican. But if he is evidently obſtinate, and refuſes to hear the church, the caſe is clear; he muſt be immediately rejected. This muſt be done by the vote of the church, and ſhould be declared in the preſence of the offender. This may be called excommunication, and is the ſecond cenſure. This cuts off the offender from all church privileges, excludes him from the ſociety of God's people, and places him viſibly in the kingdom of Satan, the God of this world. The church have no right to proceed to any farther cenſure, but muſt make their determination public, and treat the excommunicated perſon according to his ſtate, as the ſcripture directs.

When a perſon is regularly convicted of an offence, which is known out of the church, the

requiſite admonition ought to be publicly adminiſtered; and if the offender hear the church, his repentance muſt be as publicly manifeſted. For the light of the church, and of every individual, ought to ſhine before men.

In the caſe of an heretic, we read of a firſt and ſecond admonition. By an heretic, is meant one who deviates from the chriſtian faith, and attempts to lead others into his opinions, and make diviſions in the church. Some have ſuppoſed, that by the firſt and ſecond admonition in this caſe, we are to underſtand the firſt and ſecond ſteps of private dealing, with an offending brother, according to the directions of Chriſt. But this ſuppoſition appears to be groundleſs. For this direction, *A man that is an heretic, after the firſt and ſecond admonition reject*, is given to Titus, as a public miniſter or church-officer, who, acting in that capacity, would have no ſpecial concern with thoſe private admonitions, which are previous to an accuſation before the church. It is therefore reaſonable to conclude, that the firſt and ſecond admonitions, are to be given by the church, and adminiſtered by Titus, acting as a paſtor or evangeliſt, in their name and behalf. Beſides, error in doctrine, is not, in all caſes, ſo evidencial of a fixed wicked diſpoſition, as a direct violation of ſome moral precept. In the former caſe, therefore, it is reaſonable to allow more time to examine and digeſt the evidence, upon which the truth depends, than in the latter to ſee the evil of a tranſgreſſion,

which is intuitively perceived by thoſe who are taught of God. This conſideration affords a weighty reaſon for repeating the admonition in caſe of hereſy, and for omitting the repetition, in a plain and indiſputable caſe of immorality.

Beſides the cenſures of admonition and excommunication, ſome have ſuppoſed, that there is an intermediate one, which has been called ſuſpenſion. With regard to this opinion, we may obſerve, that neither ſuſpenſion, nor excommunication, are ſcriptural terms: We read of *putting away the wicked perſon; delivering to Satan; avoiding them that cauſe diviſions; withdrawing from every brother that walks diſorderly;* and treating thoſe who will not *hear the church, as heathens and publicans.* Theſe different phraſes, appear to be eſſentially of the ſame import, and all evidently imply non-communion; and thoſe who have been, and afterwards, by the cenſure of the church, are not in communion, may, with propriety, be ſaid to be excommunicated.

If by ſuſpenſion, is meant the depriving of a perſon of eccleſiaſtical privileges, until he is humbled and penitent for a crime, of which he has been convicted, it is not different from excommunication. For thoſe who are excommunicated, may, and ought to be reſtored to good ſtanding, on evidence of repentance. If it means a prohibition from public ordinances, for a ſeaſon, as a puniſhent or correction for a

ſmall crime, which does not deſerve excommunication, and admits of reſtoration to regular ſtanding, after a convenient time, without farther cenſure or evidence of repentance, it is not only without ſcriptural foundation, but plainly contrary to ſcripture and reaſon. If it means an excluſion from communion with the church, in ſpecial ordinances, on ſuſpicion or preſumption of guilt, before a legal and fair trial and conviction, it is uncharitable, arbitrary, and injurious; for that charity, which hopeth and believeth all things, requires that every man ſhould be preſumed innocent, until he is proved guilty; and liberty, and common juſtice, adopt this maxim, in all free governments. The idea of a church-member, put into a neutral ſtate, that is, neither in nor out of the church, is replete with abſurdity and contradiction.

The moſt plauſible argument, in favor of ſuſpenſion, is founded on that apoſtolic direction, *If any man obey not our word by this epiſtle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be aſhamed: yet count him not as an enemy, but admoniſh him as a brother.** Here it is ſuppoſed, that having no company, expreſſes ſuſpenſion, and not excommunication; becauſe the ſubject of cenſure, is to be admoniſhed as a brother.

To this it may be replied, that the apoſtle, by theſe words, evidently intends excommunica-

* 2 *Theſ.* iii. 14, 15.

tion; for the method of treatment, expreſſed by having no company with him, is the ſame which he preſcribes to the Corinthians, towards the moſt criminal offenders, when rejected from the communion of the church. *I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator*, &c.* If, in the latter caſe, the apoſtle intends excommunication, undoubtedly he does in the former; for he uſes the ſame ſtyle. And the brotherly admonition, to which he directs the Theſſalonians, may, without any violence to the paſſage, be conſidered as proper to be adminiſtered before excommunication; and then the meaning of the direction will be this; "You muſt excommunicate the offender, but let it be done without violence, enmity, or raſhneſs; for you muſt previouſly admoniſh him as a brother, in the bowels of love."

But if the admonition is to be given after excommunication, the words will only expreſs the temper or ſpirit, with which it ought to be adminiſtered. To avoid intimate ſociety and connection with thoſe who are excommunicated, is a practical admonition, and when properly performed, expreſſes benevolence and kindneſs towards the offenders. Thoſe, therefore, who act according to the rules of Chriſt, in avoiding the company of ſcandalous tranſgreſſors, comply with the ſpirit of the apoſtolic direction, and

* 1 *Cor.* v. 11.

count them not as enemies, but admoniſh them as brethren. Beſides, to admoniſh with words, an apoſtatized brother, with the ſpirit of meekneſs and love, is not improper in itſelf, nor inconſiſtent with treating him as an heathen man, and a publican, and having no company with him that he may be aſhamed. It rather appears to be dictated by charity, and enjoined by the apoſtle, in the text under conſideration.

CHAPTER XII.

Of the treatment of excommunicated perſons.

THE manner in which profeſſors are to conduct, towards thoſe who have been cut off from their communion, is pointed out in theſe ſcriptural directions, viz. To *withdraw from them* —to *keep no company with them*—to *treat them as heathens and publicans*. Theſe, and ſimilar expreſſions, ſeem plainly to import, that we ſhould decline all intimate ſociety with them, and, by a diſtant, and reſerved behaviour, manifeſt our diſapprobation of their crimes. The jews did not eat, or converſe freely, with heathens and publicans, and this line of conduct is, by the direction of Chriſt, to be obſerved, towards impenitent offenders. The words of Paul, to the Corinthians, are to the ſame purpoſe. *I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man who is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous,*

*or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with ſuch an one, no not to eat.** The eating which is prohibited, is that which expreſſes intimacy, or communion among friends, at a ſocial table, and which may often be expedient and neceſſary with the wicked men of the world. This the apoſtle expreſsly admits, and limits his prohibition to one "that is called a "brother."

As the great deſign of excommunication, is the good of the offender, our conduct towards thoſe who are thus cenſured, ſhould be adapted in the beſt manner to promote that end; and it is reaſonable to conclude, that ſhunning their company, and avoiding, as much as poſſible, all commerce and intercourſe with them, as moſt abominable ſinners, would naturally tend to awaken their attention, affect their hearts, and make them aſhamed of themſelves, and their conduct, unleſs they were utterly deſtitute of gracious ſenſibility.

But in acting according to the method preſcribed, it is of the greateſt importance, that we are ſo ſincerely, and deeply concerned for the beſt good of the tranſgreſſor, that we may eaſily manifeſt to his conſcience, that every circumſtance of our diſtant behaviour, and averſion to his company, is the genuine fruit of pure and undiſſembled love. The want of that brotherly

* 1 *Cor.* 5, 11.

kindneſs, which ought to prevail in the hearts of profeſſors, is the greateſt hindrance to the right performance of this duty, as well as to chriſtian practice and diſcipline in general.

In order to promote the important ends of diſcipline, in this, and every other caſe, it is very neceſſary that churches ſhould harmonize among themſelves, in all their proceedings. Diſunion among chriſtian brethren, in judgment or practice, tends directly, and unavoidably, to darken their light, deſtroy their influence, and weaken the nerves of diſcipline.

The literal prohibition of aſſociating and eating with excommunicated perſons, is not to be obſerved with unlimited ſtrictneſs; for the laws of charity, nature, and humanity, may ſometimes require a different conduct. To relieve an excommunicated perſon from imminent danger, or aſſiſt him in diſtreſs, ſeems not to be inconſiſtent with the ſpirit of the poſitive command. And to eat with ſuch an one, at the ſame table, may not always expreſs ſuch communion and intimacy as the ſcripture forbids. Huſbands and wives, parents and children, are ſo related and connected, that it would be impoſſible for them, in many ſuppoſable caſes, to obſerve the literal direction.

CHAPTER XIII.

Of the treatment of baptized children.

IF the children of believers are to be baptized, they muſt be conſidered and treated as ſubjects of the care and diſcipline of the churches to which their parents belong. No other ſuppoſition is conſiſtent with the nature and deſign of baptiſm, as they are taught in the word of God: for nothing is more evident, than that this ordinance is the mark of introduction into the family of Chriſt. And if baptized children belong to the family of Chriſt, or are, in any ſenſe, connected with the churches in which they are baptized, they muſt be ſubjects of diſcipline, according to their age and capacity.

Children evidently belonged to the Jewiſh church, and were ſubject to its diſcipline. Their parents were bound to inſtruct them early in the law and ſervice of God; and to accuſe them, if ſtubborn and rebellious, before the elders of the people. And thoſe who were circumciſed, were obliged to obſerve all the ordinances, which God had appointed in that church.

It is evident, from the directions of Paul, to the churches of Epheſus and Colloſſe, that children were conſidered, by him, as connected with thoſe churches; for, addreſſing the ſaints and faithful brethren in Chriſt Jeſus, he plainly ſup-

poſes children to be of that deſcription, and therefore exhorts them to *obey their parents in the Lord.** And that theſe children were not only adults, who had been admitted into the churches by a perſonal profeſſion of their faith, but infants or minors, under parental diſcipline, appears from the exhortation directed to parents, to *bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*†

If baptized children are thus connected with the churches, they have a right to all the privileges, and are under obligations to perform all the duties of which they are capable; but muſt be treated differently, in many reſpects, on account of their different abilities, capacities and gifts.

The diſcipline of baptized children, in early youth, is naturally entruſted with their parents, who are under ſolemn obligations to train them up for God. And churches ought to watch over the parents, and encourage and aſſiſt them in the right diſcharge of this important truſt.

When baptized children arrive to a ſuitable degree of maturity, in knowledge and judgment, they ſhould recogniſe their obligations to be the Lord's, and obſerve all the laws and ordinances which Chriſt has eſtabliſhed. At this period, they become ſubjects of public diſcipline, and are to be treated, in all reſpects, as other mem-

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* *Eph.* vi. 1, *and* † 4,

bers of the church. If they neglect the duties which Chriſt has commanded, they are to be admoniſhed, and if they refuſe to hear the admonitions of the church, when given according to the rules preſcribed in ſcripture, they muſt be cut off.

Baptized children, when they become adult, ſhould be called upon by the churches, with which they are connected, to embrace, with ſincerity, the religion of Chriſt, publicly profeſs it, and walk according to its dictates. Theſe things cannot be done by them, or others, without cordial love to God, and the truth. If, through doubts of their own ſincerity, or fear of hypocriſy, they refrain from the ordinances of the goſpel, they muſt be treated as others, who, having made a perſonal profeſſion, and come to ordinances, are at length induced to withdraw from communion with the church, becauſe they are preſſed with the ſame ſcruples.

It has been thought difficult to fix the age of maturity in baptized children. No particular and direct rules for this purpoſe, are found in the word of God. The degrees of improvement in knowledge, will often be various in different perſons, at the ſame age: To fix, therefore, on a certain age, in which they become ſubjects of public diſcipline, will expoſe to the incongruity of admitting perſons of different qualifications, to the ſame ſtanding, or of excluding ſome, and receiving others, whoſe knowledge and judg-

ment are equal. But, as churches, in other caſes, muſt judge of the knowledge and qualifications of thoſe whom they admit to public ordinances, it ſeems reaſonable, that they ſhould determine the ſtanding of baptized children, not by a particular age, but by their capacities and improvement, which will be various. And if this method of proceeding is eſtabliſhed, the baptiſm of children, on their parents account, muſt be regulated in the ſame way. And if parents become profeſſors, when they have children of different ages, thoſe children are to be baptized as infants, or called to profeſs and act for themſelves, according to their different capacities and degrees of improvement.

The inſtruction of baptized perſons, and others, who deſired to be acquainted with the doctrines of the goſpel, in order to their admiſſion to public ordinances, was conſidered, in primitive times, as an important duty, incumbent on the churches; and laid a foundation for that order of chriſtians, who were diſtinguiſhed by the name of catechumens.

In the modern Jewiſh economy, we are told, that the age of maturity is fixed, in males, at thirteen years and a day, and in females, at twelve years and a day. This eſtabliſhment aſcertains, in both ſexes, the age of puberty; and the former is, undoubtedly, the period of life, in which the tranſition from puerility to manhood, is generally marked, in males, by ſe-

veral obvious circumſtances of ſpeech and behaviour. At this age, the Jewiſh youth are ſtiled *ſons of the commandment*, and obliged to obſerve the law, being ſubject to perſonal diſcipline for their own tranſgreſſions. And in the preceding year, it is ſaid, they are directed by faſting to prepare themſelves for the manly ſtation and degree, to which they approximate. And it is ſuppoſed, if this regulation obtained among the Jews, before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the diſſolution of their ſtate, that, at that time of life, the children were generally, or always taken with their parents to the public feaſts, that they might become acquainted with the manner of obſerving and celebrating thoſe inſtitutions. And it is conjectured, with ſome degree of probability, that, according to this cuſtom, Jeſus, at the age of twelve years, was taken to Jeruſalem with his parents, at the time of the paſſover. In addition to theſe obſervations, it is remarkable that the ſacred hiſtory expreſsly informs us, that Iſhmael was circumciſed at the age of thirteen years, which, perhaps, was the extreme limit of circumciſion, on a parent's account. Whether this cuſtom of the Jews, which has been related, depends on any authority beſides propriety and convenience; and whether all the circumſtances, which have been mentioned, afford any light, to guide us in fixing the age of public diſcipline, in baptized children, or the extreme limit of infant baptiſm, on the parent's account, are ſubjects which we leave for farther conſideration and enquiry.

CHAPTER XIV.

Of the Prerogative of the Churches.

IN the times of the apoſtles, a church and chriſtian ſociety, appear to have been the ſame. All thoſe who embraced the doctrines of the goſpel, joined the church, or were baptized, and obſerved the ordinances of Chriſt. But the ſtate of things is now different. Many profeſs to acknowledge the truth of the goſpel, who do not conſider themſelves qualified to enjoy all the privileges of church-members. Theſe often expreſs ſome regard to religion, and attend with the church, on public worſhip, and means of inſtruction. Perſons of this deſcription are ſaid, in the hodiernal ſtyle, to belong to the ſociety or congregation, but not to the church. Yet, being connected with the church, in promoting public worſhip, and ſupporting miniſters, they are ſuppoſed, by many, to have a common right to all the temporalities, which are procured and uſed for thoſe purpoſes.

If ſuch members of a ſociety have a juſt and rational view of their ſtanding, and act under the influence of a conviction of the truth and importance of religion, and of the propriety of maintaining a chriſtian profeſſion, and the public worſhip of God, they will conſider their contributions as made to the church; and not claim any right to direct the particular mode, in which

the eccleſiaſtical revenue ſhall be appropriated or applied. Yet, in all expenditures, the church muſt have regard to the beſt good of the donors, and be particularly careful, in all their proceedings, to give them no juſt ground of offence.

The churches have a right to chooſe their own officers, according to the directions which are given in the word of God. The officers which Chriſt has appointed, are *ſet* in the church, and not in the world. But all are invited to come into the church, and partake of its privileges. Paſtor and flock, are correlative terms, and imply a mutual obligation. A paſtor or biſhop, is placed over a flock or church of God, and bears not the ſame relation to others. To ſpeak of a paſtor or biſhop of any people, who are not a church, is a ſoleciſm in language. And for thoſe who do not belong to a church, to chooſe a paſtor for themſelves, or aſſiſt in chooſing a paſtor for a church, is inconſiſtent with reaſon, good order, propriety, and the rights of chriſtian profeſſors.

But tho' it is the prerogative of the churches, to chooſe their paſtors and other officers, yet they ought, in every election, to have a regard to others; and to ſeek ſuch men for miniſters, as will be moſt agreeable, or leaſt exceptionable, to thoſe under whoſe obſervation they are expected to exerciſe their office, and to whom they will probably have many occaſions and calls to preach the word of life. For, a biſhop muſt

have *a good report of those who are without.** This consideration shows the expediency of taking the voice of societies, as well as churches, in calling ministers.

It must be acknowledged, that a number of men, who are not a church, and do not belong to a church, have a natural and civil right to call a man to instruct them in any branch of science. They may, therefore, invite a minister of the gospel to preach among them, and teach them the doctrines of religion. And an evangelist, or any minister, not otherwise engaged, may comply with their call, and labor with them in the gospel. His object must be to do good to their souls, and collect them into a regular church. But before this is done, neither he, nor another, can, with any propriety, become or be called their pastor.

The danger of admitting those who do not belong to churches, to join and have an equal vote with the members, in choosing officers and disposing of the ecclesiastical revenue, is very obvious. If churches are formed according to the rules of Christ, there is at least more evidence of sincere attachment to the cause of religion in the members, than those who are without. And it would be evidently inconsistent, and unsafe, to commit the management of religious affairs, to those who do not profess a

* 1 *Tim.* iii. 7.

ſincere regard for religion. For the number of ſuch may exceed that of church-members, and if they have an equal vote, they may appoint officers, and manage all eccleſiaſtical affairs, contrary to the mind of the churches, and the intereſt of the Redeemer's kingdom. Some churches have been greatly oppreſſed and injured by the influence of carnal and irreligious men, and the violent and compulſive impoſition of officers, whom they did not approve, and to whom they could not, in conſcience, ſubmit. And ſuch evils might frequently take place, if an irreligious ſociety were allowed to act and vote in elections, and in diſpoſing of the temporalities of a church. It becomes churches, therefore, to aſſert their prerogative, and in this, as well as other caſes, to "ſtand faſt in the liberty wherewith Chriſt hath made them free."

Churches ought to engage in the cauſe of Chriſt, and maintain their right to direct according to his rules, all thoſe things which reſpect the order and ſupport of public worſhip, and the ordinances of God. But a fear of expenſe has too often induced them to crouch and conform to the world, and give up their prerogative for the precarious hope of lightening their burdens, by the aſſiſtance of thoſe who manifeſt no ſincere regard to the cauſe of Chriſt. If chriſtians would aſſert their rights, ſtand faſt in the truth, encounter the difficulties of their ſtation, and boldly face the oppoſition of a frowning world, they would probably bring perſecution

on themſelves; but there is reaſon to believe, that a diſtinction being made, by ſuch practice, between the church and the world, many, who now ſlight religion, and are backward to promote it, would be convinced of its reality and importance, and freely and liberally contribute to its ſupport.

CHAPTER XV.

Of Aſſociated Preſbyteries, Synods, and Councils.

A Preſbytery, conſiſting of the elders of ſeveral churches, and veſted with authority to act as a judicature, to receive and determine appeals, and decide eccleſiaſtical cauſes for the churches which they repreſent, is a human inſtitution, and has no warrant or foundation in the word of God. Preſbytery is a Greek word, and ſignifies a body of elders. It is uſed only thrice in the new teſtament. In Luke it is rendered *the elders of the people*:* in the Acts, *the whole eſtate of the elders*:† in Timothy, the Greek word *preſbytery* is retained.‡ In the two former paſſages it refers to a Jewiſh council; in the latter, to a body of chriſtian elders, who laid their hands on Timothy. And as we read of elders in the primitive churches, it is natural to conclude, that a body of ſuch elders ſhould be

* *Chap.* xxii. 66. † *Chap.* xxii. 5. ‡ 1 *Tim.* iv. 14.

called a presbytery. And if there was a plurality of elders in every church, as has been supposed, then every church, when properly organized, had a presbytery. This was undoubtedly the case; and accordingly we are told, by those who are most conversant in the writings of the christian fathers, that the word presbytery was never used by them, in the three first centuries, in any other sense; but was frequently used to express the body of elders who presided in a particular church.

Although the word presbytery, in its scriptural and ancient meaning, denoted the body of elders in a particular church, yet the name may be applied, consistently with its derivation, to an association of presbyteries from several neighboring churches, who agree to meet and act together. An association of this kind may be very useful. The members of it may, in various ways, assist each other. Their conferences may be adapted to mutual instruction, animation and encouragement in the performance of official duties, and the practice of religion in general. They may unite their exertions, for the promotion of the common cause of religion, and consult about the proper means of propagating the truth, and effecting a reformation of doctrine and practice in the churches. They may, in some measure, supply the place of a presbytery, in destitute or unorganized churches, advise and assist them, as their circumstances require, and ordain elders and other officers over them,

when their free election of persons, duly qualified, the maturity of their state, and a hopeful prospect of their spiritual edification, concur to make it expedient. At the request of churches or individuals, they may hear and consider cases of conscience or discipline, and give their opinion or advice. They may also ordain evangelists, and recommend candidates for the ministry, when the interest of religion appears to require it.

Though such associated presbyteries are not particularly named or instituted in the word of God; yet they appear agreeable to reason, and the practice of primitive times: and the business of such bodies, as it has been described, is consistent with the spirit of the christian religion, the general rules of scripture, and the rights and privileges of the saints. But such bodies have no right to exercise authority over the churches, or to dictate or prescribe laws for the regulation of their conduct, or in any respect to interfere with their affairs, except by way of advice.

A synod, in the modern application of the term, consists of a number of those presbyteries, which singly exercise jurisdiction over the churches, within their respective limits, and agree to meet together, from time to time, in a larger body, to display their aggregate authority, in a higher degree, and more extensive sphere. But as no single presbytery, has any commission from the great head of the church, to rule au-

thoritatively over God's heritage; ſo no collective body, compoſed of ſuch preſbyteries, can lawfully claim or exerciſe dominion over the churches. A power to direct and control the adminiſtration of government and diſcipline, in particular churches, is an arrogant uſurpation of that authority, which Chriſt, their Lord, has granted and confirmed to them in his word. To pretend to looſe what is bound in heaven, or to bind what is looſed in heaven, is an inſolent and outrageous affront to the majeſty of the King of Zion.

Theſe obſervations may ſhow in what light we are to view thoſe eccleſiaſtical councils, which conſiſt of repreſentatives from many churches, and claim authority to determine caſes of diſcipline for thoſe whom they repreſent. Such judicatures are wholly of human invention, without ſupport from the word of God, and ſubverſive of chriſtian diſcipline in the churches of the ſaints. Some have, indeed, ſtrangely ſuppoſed, that we have a ſacred pattern for ſuch an aſſembly, in the acts of the apoſtles;* where we read of a queſtion, ſent from the firſt Gentile church at Antioch, to the apoſtles and elders of the church at Jeruſalem; and of the apoſtles and elders determining that queſtion, with the concurrence of the whole church, and by the direction of the Holy Ghoſt. But how this aſſembly ſhould be conſidered as an authoritative council,

* *Acts*, xv.

is altogether unaccountable, for it was the meeting of a ſingle church and its preſbytery. And the authority which obliged the Gentile churches to receive and obſerve the decree, was not that of a council, nor, indeed, of the church, but of the Holy Ghoſt, under whoſe ſpecial influence and direction the leaders of that aſſembly acted.

An approved hiſtorian, deſcribing the churches of the firſt century, ſays, "The churches, in "thoſe early times, were entirely independent: "none of them ſubject to any foreign juriſdic-"tion, but each one governed by its own rules, "and its own laws. For, though the churches "founded by the apoſtles, had this particular "deference ſhown them, that they were con-"ſulted in difficult and doubtful caſes; yet they "had no juridical authority, no ſort of ſuprem-"acy over others, nor the leaſt right to enact "laws for them. Nothing, on the contrary, is "more evident than the perfect equality that "reigned among the primitive churches, nor "does there even appear, in this firſt century, "the ſmalleſt trace of that aſſociation of provin-"cial churches, from which councils and me-"tropolitans derive their origin."* And the ſame author, on the paſſage of ſcripture which has been thought to afford an inſtance of an eccleſiaſtical council, judiciouſly obſerves, "The "meeting of the church at Jeruſalem, mention-

* *Moſheim, Eccleſ. Hiſt. Cent.* i. *p.* ii. *Ch.* 2.

"ed in the 15th chapter of Acts, is commonly "conſidered as the firſt chriſtian council. But this "notion ariſes from a manifeſt abuſe of the "word council. That meeting was only of "one church, and if ſuch a meeting be called a "council, it will follow, that there were in-"numerable councils in primitive times: but "every one knows, that a council is an aſſem-"bly of deputies or commiſſioners, ſent from "ſeveral churches, aſſociated, by certain bonds, "in a general body, and, therefore, the ſuppo-"ſition abovementioned falls to the ground."*

In the obſervations which have been made, there is nothing inconſiſtent with the voluntary aſſociation of miniſters and private chriſtians, or of preſbyteries and churches, to confer on religious ſubjects, conſult and deliberate concerning the means of promoting the kingdom of Chriſt, or to cultivate chriſtian knowledge, communion and brotherly-love. Societies, formed for theſe purpoſes, may be very commendable and uſeful. And as the elders of different churches, may agree to form ſuch aſſociated preſbyteries as have been deſcribed; ſo a number of aſſociated preſbyteries, may agree to meet, in one body, from time to time, and conſult and adviſe together, concerning the moſt proper and effectual meaſures to advance the cauſe of truth and religion; and by their joint conſultation, may ſtrengthen, edify, quicken and encourage one another; and

* *Moſheim, Eccleſ. Hiſt. Cent.* i. *p.* ii. *C.* 2. *note.*

ſuch a body may be called an aſſociated ſynod. Or if particular churches, or aſſociated preſbyteries, or ſynods, ſhould chooſe to appoint delegates to form a general council, for the purpoſe of maintaining mutual acquaintance and correſpondence, among chriſtians of the ſame faith, ſcattered over an extenſive country, no reaſonable objection could be made to the plan, ſo long as theſe voluntary aſſociations claimed no authority or juriſdiction over the churches, nor encroached upon the prerogatives which Chriſt has granted them.

CHAPTER XVI.

Of Candidates for the Goſpel Miniſtry.

FOR any important office, ſome previous knowledge and qualifications are requiſite; and in many caſes, it is proper and neceſſary, to educate men for the particular employmet for which they are deſigned.

The office of a biſhop may, according to the apoſtle, be a proper object of deſire; and the perſon who rationally deſires it, will certainly endeavor to obtain thoſe qualifications which are neceſſary for ſuch a good work, and which may be acquired, or increaſed by human means.

Some ſuppoſe, that thoſe who enter into the work of the miniſtry, muſt have an immediate call from God, and be ſupernaturally endowed with all thoſe gifts, which are neceſſary to be employed in that work. In this manner, it is ſuppoſed that the primitive miniſters of Chriſt were called and furniſhed for his ſervice. It is true, that miniſters were raiſed up by a divine influence on their minds, and were filled with the Holy Ghoſt, in ſuch an extraordiary manner, as to ſuperſede the neceſſity of human inſtruction. This appears to have been the caſe with Paul, who, though he was previouſly inſtructed in ſcience, was immediately taught of God, in matters of religion.

If a man ſhould be called to the work of the miniſtry, by a ſpecial and immediate direction from the ſpirit of God, it muſt be acknowledged, that he might and ought to exerciſe his office, as Paul did, without conferring with fleſh and blood. But ſome extraordinary evidence, of his extraordinary call, muſt be produced, in order to juſtify his conduct in the view of the churches: and till this is done, he muſt be conſidered as acting diſorderly in all his public miniſtrations.

But it is evident, from ſcripture, that others were educated and inſtructed with a view to the miniſtry. The diſciples of Chriſt, who were to be the firſt miniſters of his kingdom, were regularly inſtructed by him until his aſcenſion, though they were afterwards to be endowed

with the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt. Timothy, Titus, and others, were probably under the immediate inſtruction of Paul, training up for the miniſtry.

The manner in which candidates for the miniſtry were inſtructed, is not particularly deſcribed. It is probable, that it varied according to circumſtances: and there is reaſon to think, that one method was, for young men to travel with the apoſtles and evangeliſts, to hear their converſation and preaching, to obſerve their manner of performing the buſineſs of the miniſtry, and, under their direction, to exerciſe their gifts, in teaching and exhorting others, according to their ability. This coincides very much with the method which Chriſt uſed, in inſtructing his diſciples, who were training up for the apoſtleſhip. And a ſimilar mode, as far as circumſtances would permit, might be practiſed in churches, under the direction of the biſhops or paſtors. It is alſo probable, that ſchools were very early eſtabliſhed, for the particular purpoſe of educating youth for the miniſtry.

The deacons appear to have been the loweſt order of officers, in the primitive churches, and their employment was, probably, in the inferior branches of miniſterial labor. But, as they were under advantages to improve in knowledge, from the exerciſe of their gifts, in diſcharging the functions of their office, it is not unlikely, that, in many inſtances, it proved a ſtep to farther ad-

vancement in the church. The words of Paul to Timothy, ſeem to countenance this conjecture: *They that have uſed the office of a deacon well, purchaſe to themſelves a good degree, and great boldneſs in the faith which is in Chriſt Jeſus.**

The miniſters of the goſpel, being inſtructors and leaders, or, in the language of our tranſlation, rulers in eccleſiaſtical affairs, muſt be ſuppoſed, in general, to be the beſt judges of the gifts and qualifications of others, for the work of the miniſtry. And it correſponds with the precedency implied in their office, and perfectly conſiſts with the rights of private chriſtians and churches, that they ſhould recommend ſuch perſons as appear to be promiſing, as candidates for the miniſtry. In order to recommendation, and, indeed, always before ordination, candidates ſhould be conſidered as under trials, and in this ſtate, ſhould be ſubject to the advice and direction of thoſe miniſters by whom they are tried, and by whoſe aſſiſtance they ſeek an introduction into the ſacred work. From this ſtate of trial, a candidate may be called, by the election of ſome particular church, to the office of an elder or biſhop, and in a regular and ſolemn manner, be ordained or appointed to that particular charge. But if they are not called, or do not accept of a call to a particular charge, they may, and ought to be ordained as evangeliſts, when they are judged to be competent in

* 1 *Tim.* iii. 13.

knowledge and experience, for the performance of the duties of public miniſters of the goſpel.

The mode of trying and examining candidates, may be varied according to circumſtances. But in general, it is expedient that they be inſtructed in human ſcience, particularly in thoſe branches which tend moſt directly to enlarge the mind, and give ſtrength, energy and diſcernment, to the rational powers. Their ability for public performances is beſt determined by experiment. They ſhould therefore be directed by their inſtructors, to exerciſe their gifts in ſocial prayer, religious converſation and exhortation, in a more private or public manner, as they appear to be qualified. Thus ſome eſtimation may be made of their qualifications for the public parts of miniſterial labor, and of their acceptation with thoſe, among whom they may miniſter in holy things.

It may be proper to add, that it is of the greateſt importance, that candidates for the goſpel miniſtry ſhould be experimentally acquainted with religion, appear heartily and zealouſly engaged in the cauſe of the Redeemer, and poſſeſs thoſe moral qualifications of a biſhop, which are expreſsly mentioned in the word of God. And it may be expedient, in ſome caſes, to diſpenſe with the want of a particular acquaintance with ſeveral branches of human ſcience, if the deficiency is compenſated by ſuperior gifts,

eminent grace, peculiar aptneſs to teach, and a good underſtanding of that ſyſtem of theology, which is contained in divine revelation.

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THE END.

AN ACT,

To incorporate ſundry Perſons as Truſtees of the Society, inſtituted in Morris-County, for the Promotion of Learning *and* Religion.

WHEREAS the Society, inſtituted in Morris-County, for the promotion of Learning and Religion, have, in and by their petition to the Council and General Aſſembly of this State, repreſented and ſet forth, that, being deſirous of eſtabliſhing a fund for promoting the above laudable purpoſe, they are prevented from doing it, by not being incorporated as a ſociety, and thereby enabled, legally to hold and diſpoſe of lands, goods, or other property: therefore,

Be it enacted by the Council and General Aſſembly of this State, and it is enacted by the authority of the ſame, That BENJAMIN HOWELL, WILLIAM ROSS, and JOSEPH HARRISON, Eſquires, and JACOB GREEN, JEDEDIAH CHAPMAN, AMZI LEWIS, JOSEPH GROVER, DAVID BALDWIN, and STEPHEN MONSON, be, and they hereby are appointed Truſtees of the Society in Morris-County, inſtituted for the promotion of Learning and Religion; and they the ſaid B. HOWELL, W. ROSS, J. HARRISON, J. GREEN, J. CHAPMAN, A. LEWIS, J. GROVER, D. BALDWIN, and S.

MONSON, and their ſucceſſors in office, are hereby conſtituted a body corporate and politic, in deed, fact, and name, to all intents and purpoſes, for ever, to be known by the name of the Truſtees of the Society in Morris-County, inſtituted for the promotion of Learning and Religion, and by that name they ſhall have perpetual ſucceſſion.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforeſaid, That the Truſtees, ſo as aforeſaid appointed and named, be, and they hereby are conſtituted a body corporate and politic, and ſhall for ever after be authorized, in law, to purchaſe, take, hold, receive, and enjoy, any meſſuages, houſes, buildings, lands, tenements, rents, poſſeſſions, and other hereditaments and real eſtate, in fee-ſimple, or otherwiſe; and alſo goods, chattles, legacies and donations, given to the ſaid ſociety in any way or manner, and all other things, of what kind or quality ſoever, to the amount of a ſum, the annual income whereof ſhall not exceed five hundred pounds; and alſo, that the ſaid Truſtees, and their ſucceſſors, by the beforementioned name and title, ſhall and may give, grant and demiſe, aſſign, ſell, or otherwiſe diſpoſe of all or any of their meſſuages, houſes, lands, tenements, rents, poſſeſſions, or other hereditaments and real eſtate, and all other goods, chattles, and other things, as to them ſhall ſeem meet, for the benefit of the ſaid ſociety: And alſo, that they, and their ſucceſſors, by the beforementioned name and title, for ever

hereafter, ſhall be able in law, and capable to ſue and be ſued, emplead and be empleaded, anſwer and be anſwered, defend and be defended, in all courts of judicature whatſoever: And alſo, that the ſaid Truſtees, for the time being, and their ſucceſſors, ſhall and may, for ever hereafter, have and uſe a common ſeal, with ſuch device and devices as they ſhall think proper, for ſealing all and ſingular deeds, grants, conveyances, contracts, bonds, articles of agreement, aſſignations, powers and authorities, and all and ſingular other affairs and things, touching and concerning the ſaid corporation: And alſo, that the ſaid Truſtees, and their ſucceſſors, for ever hereafter, may, as often as they ſhall judge expedient, break, change, and new-make the ſame, or any other, their common ſeal.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforeſaid, That for perpetuating a line of ſucceſſion in ſaid Truſtees, in a conſtitutional manner, it ſhall and may be lawful, for the ſociety aforeſaid, at any regular meeting, to elect a new Truſtee or Truſtees, in caſe of any vacancy of ſaid Truſtees, by death, removal, or any other incapacity; and it may be lawful for ſaid ſociety, at any regular meeting, together with the major part of ſaid Truſtees, to diſmiſs from office, any Truſtee, when they ſhall judge that his removal to too great a diſtance, his inattention to the buſineſs of a Truſtee, or any other matter, ſhall render it needful for him to be diſcharged, and thereupon to elect another in his room. *Provid-*

ed, That the number of Truſtees ſhall not, at any one time, exceed nine. *Provided alſo*, That each and every of the Truſtees, herein appointed, and their ſucceſſors, previouſly to their entering upon the duties of their appointment, ſhall take and ſubſcribe the oaths of abjuration and allegiance, preſcribed in the act, entitled, an act for the ſecurity of the government of New-Jerſey, paſſed the nineteenth day of September, in the year of our Lord, ſeventeen hundred and ſeventy-ſix; together with an oath of office, to execute the truſt repoſed in them, with fidelity and to the beſt of their underſtanding.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforeſaid, That it ſhall and may be lawful, for the ſaid Truſtees, and their ſucceſſors, from time to time, to chooſe a Preſident, being one of their number, and alſo a Treaſurer; and the Preſident ſhall keep in cuſtody the common ſeal of the ſaid corporation, and all the books, charters, deeds, and writings, any way relating to the ſaid corporation; and ſhall have power, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, as occaſion may require, to call a meeting of the ſaid Truſtees, for the execution of all or any of the powers hereby given them; and in the caſe of ſickneſs, abſence, or death of the Preſident, all the powers, by this act inveſted in the Preſident, ſhall be and remain in the eldeſt Truſtee upon record, until the recovery or return of the Preſident, or until a new Preſident be choſen, in manner aforeſaid: and the Treaſurer, for the

time being, ſhall annually, and oftener, if required by the Truſtees, render a fair account of all the money or ſums that he has received, and alſo all that he has expended, by order of the Truſtees. The Treaſurer ſhall alſo, previouſly to his acting in his office, take the oaths to the government, and an oath of office, for the faithful diſcharge of the truſt repoſed in him: and it ſhall be lawful for the ſaid Truſtees, annually, to chooſe a new Treaſurer, if they think proper.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforeſaid, That all and every act and acts, order and orders, of five of the ſaid Truſtees, but not of a leſs number, conſented and agreed to, at ſuch meeting of the Truſtees aforeſaid, ſhall be, and hereby are ratified, made good, valid, and effectual, to all intents and purpoſes, as if the whole number of Truſtees had conſented and agreed thereto.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforeſaid, That all the proceedings of the ſaid Truſtees ſhall, from time to time, be fairly entered in a book or books, to be kept for that purpoſe, by the Preſident of the Truſtees, for the time being; which book or books (together with the common ſeal of the ſaid corporation, and all charters, deeds, and writings whatſoever, belonging, or in any wiſe appertaining unto the ſaid corporation) ſhall be delivered over by the former Preſident, to the Preſident of the ſaid Truſtees, newly elected for the time being (as

ſuch Preſident ſhall, from time to time, ſucceſſively be choſen) to be regularly filed and ſafely kept by the ſaid Preſident, for the mutual benefit of the beforementioned ſociety, unto all which books and records, any member of the ſaid ſociety may have free acceſs, upon application to the ſaid Preſident, for that purpoſe.

PASSED AT BURLINGTON,

May 30*th*, 1787.

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